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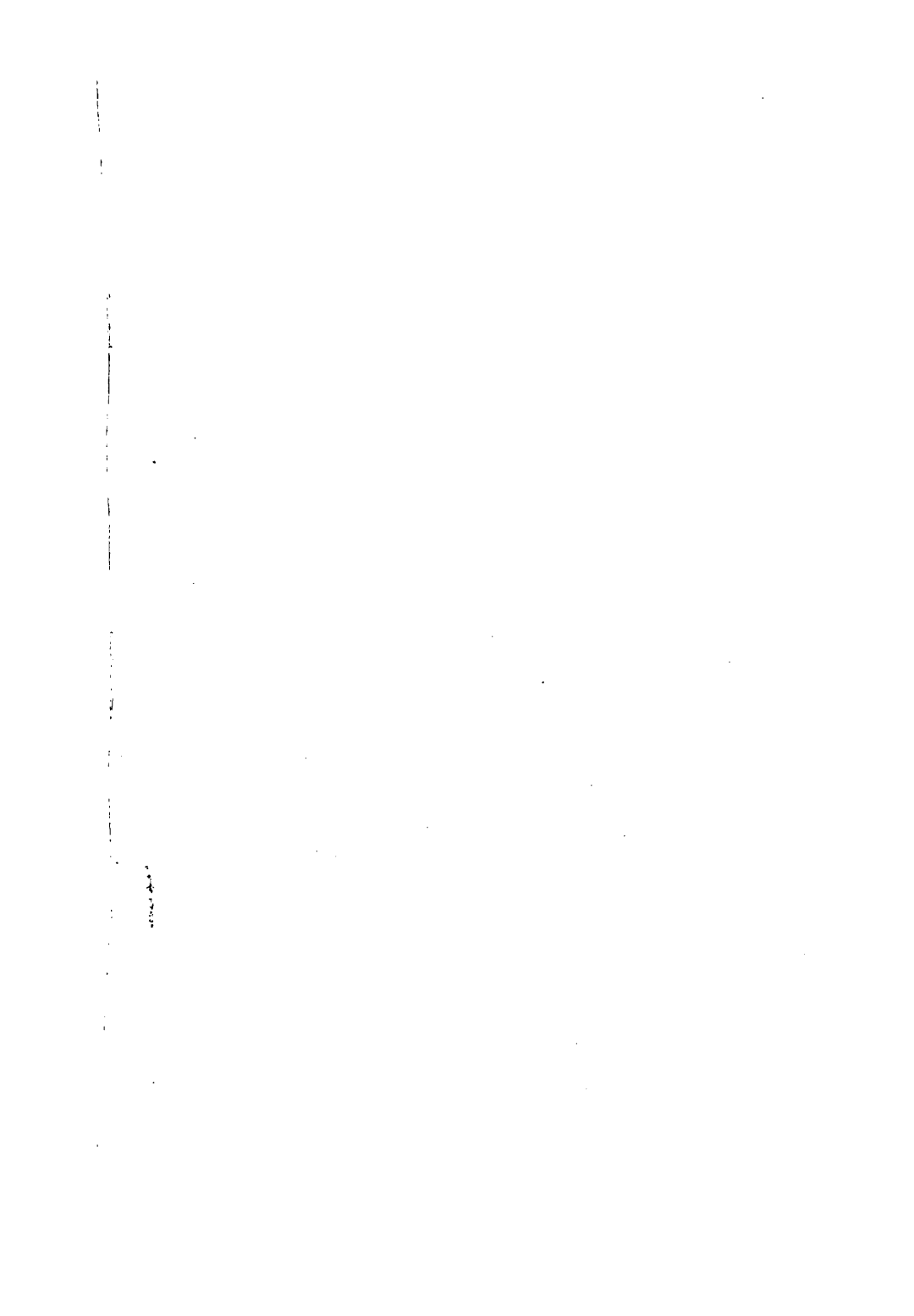
The
KING'S
MEN

JOHN LESLIE PALMER



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The King's Men

By

John Palmer

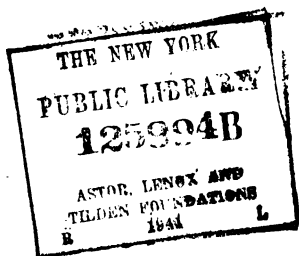
Author of "Peter Paragon"



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PREFACE

FOR the moment the great European war appears mainly as a military event shaping to an end in Flanders, Poland, and the Near East. Even those whose work has hitherto denied them an active part in the progress of the armies look continually towards the battlefield.

But the war is not only a military event. It is, so far as the English are concerned, a social revolution—a social revolution beside which all former revolutions will one day seem to be of Lilliput. We cannot measure it as yet. We are hardly aware of its progress. We shall only realise how deep and complete it is when the fighting is finished, and our political leaders find themselves confronted with Young England.

The war found us in the act of taking to its extreme consequence the doctrine of personal licence. In politics the State had virtually retired from sovereignty. The chief political parties were talking freely of civil war on the merely administrative question as to how Ireland

should be governed; and an even graver strife was coming to a head in the organised preparations for war of capital and labour. The whole idea of community, of service, of the interest of the State itself as distinguished from its factions, was in abeyance. This anarchy was vividly reflected in the preciosity and wilfulness of our art and literature. Our most successful authors and artists were, in the strict sense of the word, the most insolent. Simplicity—which is an accessible, companionable, and social thing—had given way to clever personal attitudes. A vigilant self-assertion, a perpetual and sore pushfulness, a tendency of individuals and classes to brood privately upon their own affairs, to refine upon their solitary thoughts, ambitions, and interests—these tendencies, while they gave to our social life an appearance of diversity, movement, and great opulence, were in reality the symptoms of a rapid decay of communal feeling.

Then the war suddenly required the English nation to act as a regiment, to restore communal discipline, to realise that the one party to our general disputing which we had hitherto ignored—the State itself—was the party which henceforth would have to count most in all our lives.

Such a change of attitude could not at once be effected. There are many yet who are obtuse to its necessity. But the pressure of the event increases, and the revolution goes on. To any one who has been long immersed in its political and social consequences it already appears as irresistible and endless. Those who are not young or supple enough to conform will simply drop out of the reckoning when our suspended social and political life is resumed.

To give any sort of picture of a process so gigantic is impossible to-day. Only the more obvious and immediate results of the general crumbling and slipping of our old standards can be observed—those which happen to lie under the eye of this or that particular observer. I have aimed, in *The King's Men*, at showing the new heaven at work among a typical group of young people such as could be plentifully found in the London of August, 1914. Each of them stands for a fairly common English type of the period before the war, admitting at once or resisting, as the case may be, the new influences. To picture Young England as the war will leave her is not possible. But here, at least, I have tried to find a piece of her.

I venture to hope that *The King's Men* may be

read in America; for, though it is a story, it is also a thesis which the serious reader will easily strip of its disguise. It is important—not least of all for America—that the world should realise what is going to be the spirit of Young England after the war. Her new ways of acting and thinking will soon be clear to history; but at present, because all eyes are upon the actual combatants, few words are written concerning a social revolution which has already entered two out of every three English homes. I happen personally to be placed where these changes are very generally visible and striking; and, though it is impossible to get them as yet into any sort of perspective, I have found it equally impossible to abstain from a faint contemporary record of the process as it has presented itself to me personally. It may be objected that the result of thus playing with history in embryo must needs be a crude political pamphlet rather than a novel. But European writers are all of them pamphleteers to-day so far as they can seriously be anything at all.

JOHN PALMER.

COVENT GARDEN, LONDON,
April, 1916.

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The King's Men

The King's Men

I

THE EVE OF HOSTILITIES

A MAN was picking his way in the dark up an echoing staircase in Mortimer Street. Already he smelled the tobacco of his friends and heard their talk. They were discussing the news in the attic of Rupert Smith, a young author who distributed latchkeys among his acquaintances, and was always ready for unlimited conversation after midnight. It was one o'clock in the morning. The man on the stairs had let himself into the dark passage, and now he was blundering upon the top flight just under the door of the attic.

He stood for a moment outside. The conversation to-night was louder than usual, a fact which did not surprise him.

"At last," he thought, "they really have something to talk about."

The King's Men

He meant that they were not now assessing the poetry of Marinetti or interpreting Picasso, people for whom it had been his way to express a humorous contempt.

Then he reflected that there had been as much affectation in his own smiling superiority to all those clever attitudes of the time as in the attitudes themselves; and he frowned, for he knew that his smiling was out of date. All the old pretences, interests and disputations were finished now. He could think of very little connected with the staircase of Rupert Smith which had not in the last thirty-six hours been obliterated.

He flung open the door and fell over the legs of Smith himself. Smith always sat by the door, because his room was small, and usually held a dozen men who needed to be supplied with biscuits from the kitchen.

Then everyone in the room stopped talking and shouted the name of John.

It was a custom for those who held the key to shout the name of each confederate as he came. "John" was not a Christian name—Christian names were barred as being insufficiently austere for these meetings. It was the family name of Mr. Kenneth John.



"You might have known my legs would be there. They always are," said Smith.

"That is mere foolishness," said John, brushing his knees. "Nothing will ever again be where it was before."

"Is there any more news?" asked a pale young man from the window.

John found a chair.

"The last special edition but one said that war was declared by Great Britain at eleven o'clock, and the last edition of all could only add that war having been declared by Great Britain, Great Britain might now regard herself as being in a state of war."

"There's some coffee in the urn," said Smith.

"Why are you so late?"

"I've been watching the crowds."

"How do they look?"

"Not exactly excited. Stunned, rather. I stood among the people when the proclamation was read. It was like attending divine service."

"I wonder," said Smith, "how long it will take us to realise what has happened?"

"I'll tell you what," jerked the young man at the window. "This puts back art and literature for a generation."

Smith moved angrily in his chair.

"Shut up, Pelham," he shouted.

"You don't agree?"

"I neither agree nor disagree. I only know that a fellow who talks like that to-night annoys me."

"Puts back art and literature for a generation," repeated the young man stubbornly.

"Who cares?" Smith impiously inquired.

"We all care," said the young man at the window. "Smith himself cares," he continued, informing the company.

"I'll show you how much I care," said Smith.

He quietly rose to his six feet of height, shook a big and attractive head, and walked to his writing-desk. From the drawer he took a bulky MS. and held it up to be observed.

"This," he said, "is the sole copy of the book you fellows have watched me writing for three years. Four days ago I pinned my career to it. It was the best I could do."

He paused for an effective moment and suddenly hurled the heavy packet into the waste-paper basket. Then he walked back to his chair.

"That," said the pale young man unpleasantly, "means nothing at all except that war between

Great Britain and Germany has not impaired your sense of the theatre. Meantime my point is made. Your MS. is in the waste-paper basket, and I do you the honour to believe that literature is the poorer for its lying there."

No one had ever yet successfully argued with James Pelham. The frequenters of that room had long become used to letting him win his point. Then they would talk about something else.

"The real question is this," said a dandy by the fireplace. "Who is going to fight?"

"You will go, of course," said Smith.

Smith's manner of saying this was not agreeable.

"Ponsonby," he continued to the room at large, "will begin pulling the wires to-morrow. He will be appointed A.D.C. to a general and then he will come home and write a book about it."

"What's the matter with Smith to-night?" asked John in a general way.

Everyone now expected Smith to explain himself.

"It's perfectly simple," said Smith. "I dislike intensely every one of you to-night. These rooms make me feel sick. When you've all gone home I shall go out and sleep on the Embankment. It will be fresh out there."

"You put it well," said an athletic man who was sitting on the table. "We're feeling it badly."

"Speak for yourself, Rivers," retorted Pelham. "We aren't all smelling our dead selves. I intend to go on living as before. Why should I give up poetry and ideas because you fellows are mad about the war? Someone must remain to assert the importance of art. I have always thought Shakespeare was greater than the Duke of Wellington, and I shall continue to do so."

"Pelham," interrupted Smith, "I'm glad to believe that you will suffer for this. Do you imagine that you are going to assert the importance of art by ignoring the biggest thing of your time? If you can't already see that what you please to call your poetry and ideas are not all as dead as door nails in a mortuary, and that we in this room have simply got to begin all over again from the bottom, you've been using my latchkey in vain. I've no use for anybody here to-night who doesn't detest himself."

"Excellent," said Rivers from the table. "This war cleans the slate."

Pelham's icy blue eyes looked Rivers up and down.

"I don't object to Smith," he said at last. "Smith is really upset and has just thrown a good book into the waste-paper basket; but Rivers is contemptible. The war will change many things, but it will not change Rivers. He will kill no more big game in Africa; but he will kill big Germans in Belgium; and he will call it a change of soul. How I do hate a fool!"

"We always did dislike one another," said Rivers genially. "At least I'm not going out to fight a war that will end war."

"Meaning me, I suppose," Pelham inquired.

"Just as you like," answered Rivers.

Pelham glittered dangerously. "I'm not that sort of fool," he said quickly. "I promise you fellows that if I go out to fight it shall at least be the real thing. I shall go out to take an honest part in something of which I now thoroughly disapprove, and I shall do it because I'm too spineless to stand up for my own convictions. I sha'n't delude myself into imagining that firing off high explosive is the best way to bring about the millennium. I'm not a hypocrite like Rivers, who is going out to fight because he likes it and will call it patriotism."

"Pelham is taking it badly," said Smith com-

passionately. "Kicking against the pricks, that's what it is."

"I'll tell you what it is," said Ponsonby. "We shall all have to go to the war sooner or later. It's the thing to do."

"Now we know about it," said Pelham. "Ponsonby has said it is the thing to do. Who should know better than Ponsonby?"

"There is more than the wisdom of a popinjay in what Ponsonby says," put in Smith, as though he were thinking aloud. "We all know Ponsonby. His object in life is to be in the thick of everything that happens and to catch a reflection of importance from the event. We are all aware that if he goes to the war and gets killed like a hero, he will only do so because he knows that the war is a big thing and because he doesn't want to be out of it. But for once Ponsonby has hit the absolute truth. His snobbery is transcendently right. We shall all have to go to the war. It's the thing to do, and we simply can't stay away. Pelham will go because he hates it. Rivers will go because he likes it. Some men will go because they're anxious to show they're as brave and good as the other fellows, or because they're bored, or under the social thumb."

"I'm not going," jerked Pelham.

"Oh yes, you are," continued Smith. "You *think* you are not, but you are. I'll give you six weeks to find out that you can't help it. Take my advice and go at once. It will save you some mental anguish."

"I'm with Jimmy Pelham," said a solidly constructed man from the sofa. "I'm not going to the war."

But this man was only Baddeley. Baddeley was a comfortably married man in a Government office. So nobody heeded him. Pelham left his seat, brandishing his forefinger at Smith.

"Anguish indeed! There will be anguish for us all when this seedy old Government gets to work."

"None of your socialism," shouted Smith irrelevantly.

Pelham turned at the door. His blue eyes lit with frenzy.

"Idiot!" he said, levelling an accusing finger at Smith. "Do you think that because there is a war this country will suddenly become wise? It will take at least a year for the public to understand what it really means to come up against a scientific enemy. There will be politics and strikes

and do-as-you-please. Things will go on exactly as before, till they break down.'

"You're wrong about the politics," said Rivers innocently. "There is a Party Truce."

As if Rivers had touched a spring he released from Pelham a swift torrent of words.

"Don't you realise," he shouted, "that your silly phrase proves what I say? If we had the imagination really to see this war for what it is, a Party Truce would be unthinkable. You tell me the political people have agreed to postpone their differences. Good heavens, Rivers, their differences have ceased to exist; and they are unaware of it! There are men in this country who can still think of their wretched little notions, think of them so seriously that they solemnly agree to say nothing about them for the present. They think they're going to take up the old threads when the war is finished. They look on the war as an interlude; and you believe that these men are going to fight the biggest fight in history without making every true Englishman weep bitter tears."

"True Englishmen!" ejaculated Smith to the company. "Listen to Pelham!"

"True Englishmen," Pelham shamelessly re-

peated. "I mean the half-dozen men in the country who have some sense of humour."

"*Bien entendu*," said Smith very gravely. "We have interrupted you."

"Not at all," said Pelham. "I was about to say that there will be worse things than party politics. Think of the Press. Think of the contractors who will sell things to the army. I tell you there is no infamy we shall not live to see. Think of the jobbery" (here he glared at Ponsonby) "in the Departments. Think of organised labour. We shall be told that scientific methods of raising and equipping an army are against the principles of a free and self-governing people. There is no degradation to which we shall not descend. It is even possible that the authorities will *advertise* for soldiers!"

Pelham paused for breath, and added in a deep whisper of contempt:

"The authorities."

He left the room and the door banged behind him, echoing through the uncarpeted passages of the building. There was a short silence.

"To think," said Smith at last, "that a few months hence Pelham will be saluting his superior officer."

"I should like Pelham," said Rivers inconsequently, "if he didn't talk such absolute nonsense."

"He's got a good head," said Smith. "He usually knows how much nonsense he talks. Tonight he is simply savage; and he's right. This war is not going to be exactly pleasant for any of us. Even Rivers will admit that war is in some ways disagreeable. Some of us are going to hate it."

"Hate it," he repeated with great energy after a pause. "It isn't good to have your life suddenly cut off at the root. The best we can do is to start fresh and pretend that we like it. But it hurts. It hurts atrociously."

"I'm going to bed," he abruptly added.

No further word was said. Smith's visitors went heavily down the stairs and let themselves out into the street.

II

AN END AND A BEGINNING

KENNETH JOHN lived in a house by the Heath in Hampstead Way, Golders Green; and he would often walk down from Jack Straw's ridge to his home in the summer air.

A fortnight or so after the meeting in Rupert Smith's rooms, at eleven o'clock in the evening, he was following his usual path along the high-road which so pointedly offers the lights of London to a moralist.

He tried as he walked to define his impressions of the talk he had heard in these last few days in Mortimer Street. He saw it as the flashing surface of a full stream. He knew exactly how deep a feeling lay under all the rhetoric and fierce chaff of Pelham and Smith. These men belonged peculiarly to the age before the war—an age, already so remote, of complete licence and leisure, when men were able to refine at ease upon their ideas. Every one of the men in Smith's room had in his

individual way stood for something and achieved something in the life which now lay with Rupert Smith's big MS. in the waste-paper basket. The MS. was a symbol. It was to have been the first of a series in which the ideas and feelings of the young sentient person of the day were analysed and recorded in a hundred fine shades. It stood for a period in literature, society and art which had been full of æsthetic adventures, moral questions and defiant personalities—a busy and clever time which, for all its folly and egotism, had put new colours into the sky and gallantly challenged the incredulous Philistine upon every road.

It had been John's attitude in those days to affect a polite scepticism towards the plenitude of notions and the lively straw-splitting of Mortimer Street. It was his little personal joke to decry the intellectual ferment of a new century in its teens. He used his clever pen in a genial depreciation of the modern thinker. He would gently prophesy the coming extinction of all his friends in an era of restored simplicity and broad romance.

To-night as he walked along Turpin's old road he knew that the time of which he had lightly prophesied had come in earnest, and that his own

attitude had perished with the rest. He felt empty and cold. His familiar world of music and thought and form had been expunged. He could think of no friendship or interest, nothing he had once wanted or disliked, which was not affected. He knew that all this must apply even more directly to his friends than to himself. He at least was saving one or two things out of the past.

Kenneth John had as yet no urgent problem to face. He did not feel called to share in the war as a combatant. John was far from being obviously built for a soldier. He was short-sighted, barely five feet three inches in height, and of a gentle disposition. He had once tried unsuccessfully to kill a rabbit. He might have made an excellent general, but the intermediate stages were beyond him. Of course he could find a niche in the Great War if he set about it; but it was not yet clearly required of him.

That John was not at this moment urgently called to the war left him free to contemplate the general catastrophe. His first alarm at a prospect of private ruin—a prospect which seemed in those days to threaten everyone—had already given way to an absorbed interest. The leaven of war at work in a society hitherto running on the assump-

tion that order and peace were irrefragable things had already presented him with some astonishing discoveries. People had suddenly been deprived of their habits. John had learnt more about his friends and acquaintances in the last three days than in the five previous years of his London career. He had seen the best and the worst in men whom before he had only known as able to talk well or ill. His day was full of surprises. He had seen selfish fear peeping out of a man who had been accepted, in his days of routine and security, as a daring apostle of revolution. He had seen quixotry and the light of adventure in men whom he had regarded as only fit for the Government offices they served. He had seen men reputed to be of iron on the strength of their ability to live according to rule suddenly struck nervous and incalculable; and he had seen a woman whom he had admired for the strong repose of her nature fighting for groceries at the Army and Navy Stores.

Moreover, he had seen the life to which he—in spite of his affected detachment—himself belonged dismissed from its pride of place. He, who had been living at the centre of things, sharing modestly in the literary and political life of the time, now counted for nothing at all. He was conscious

most of all to-night of being entirely out of it. Something tremendous was going on in which he had no personal share, of which he would see very little.

Before turning down the hill towards home he stood for a moment looking towards London. He thought of the war as a thing which had entered a thousand homes to sit beside the hearth as a guest with whom strict terms would have to be made. He was looking into a pool dreadfully stirred by the angel of war—perhaps an angel of healing. Men and women were meeting there the test of their lives. He remembered how in the crowd that night he had heard a man say to his companion: "This is the end of everything."

And the man had answered:

"You are wrong, my friend. This is the beginning of everything."

III

A HOME REVITALISED

WHEN John turned from his contemplation of London, and the thick trees of the North Road closed about him, he began to think of Monica. She would be waiting for him at home with a pot of cocoa and biscuits. He had had new thoughts of Monica during the last few days. Up to that time his marriage had been the purest comfort—a continuous well-being distracted with occasional renewals of an earlier and more ardent time. Latterly it had been the comfort which counted most. He was so sure of her; so familiar with every facet of her mind. Their life was a genial and a peaceful intimacy. There was no more striving after things inexpressible. Their relations had become homely and punctual. The adventure had gone out of them. They had not quarrelled for an age. Everything between them had been so thoroughly explored that it seemed as though they must now con-

sent to write upon their happy page: *Da capo al segno*.

Then a few days ago John had brought to Monica the news of a crisis to be met. They had lived for the five years of their married life up to the top of a small income, and this income was now in jeopardy. They had to plan economies and decide what was to be done if the worst should happen.

The sense and courage with which Monica had faced these unexpected needs had renewed in him an old pride in her—a selfless admiration which yet again put Monica familiar as she was, among the miracles. They had returned to the first struggling days of their marriage, when joy was sharpened by a wolf at the door.

Clearly this companionship was more than a mutual ease. It had bloomed afresh under a threat. Their marriage had not yet become a habit. The events of the last few days threatened to destroy in a week habits which had taken many years to form. But Monica remained.

The household peril had quickly passed. John learned that the weekly paper he served would continue to be published as usual, and that his political chief still needed a private secretary. But

the crisis had served its turn. It had put fresh life into his partnership with Monica.

She heard his key and was already warming the cocoa. This was the late home-coming to which he had so long been used—very familiar, domestic and assured. But to-night Monica might have been a spirit brewing celestial liquor.

Monica knew this, and told him as he came to her that he was a foolish man.

For an answer he kissed her very kindly, and some of the milk was spilled.

"Less cocoa for both of us," she said.

"It is a token," he answered. "We were beginning to be too comfortable, don't you think? It was all roast potatoes and coming home to cocoa and biscuits."

"And very nice too."

"The beginning of the end."

"But, Ken, dear, let us be fair to ourselves. We were always very nice to one another."

"I know," John gloomily agreed. "It had become a habit."

"Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"Because I didn't know."

"And now you have made a discovery?"

"Now," retorted John, "I'm really fond of you. A fortnight ago I was simply a married man."

"I know exactly what you mean," said Monica. "I want to talk to you about it. The Baddeleys have been here."

John put his cup down. He was not disturbed by a seeming want of connection in Monica's remark. She would establish her own train of thought. But at last, since she hesitated to go on, he asked her:

"What have the Baddeleys to do with it?"

"They bumbled."

"I don't understand."

"It was you who invented the word," said Monica.

"I understand that they bumbled. But what has the bumbling of the Baddeleys to do with us?"

"They simply disgraced our Chesterfield. They sprawled."

"Well, Monica, they *are* married, you know."

"All the less reason for a public display. Can't the man work off his feelings in his own house? But that's not the point."

"I'm waiting for the point," said John.

"The point is that Sally is mortally afraid that Bob may go to the war. She was talking at him

the whole evening. She repeated every five minutes that a man's first duty was to his wife."

"You are putting your knife into Sally," said John.

Monica grasped him by the arm.

"Kenneth," she said, "Sally had only one idea. She might lose her man. That's all this business means to her. If Bob tries to go, she will simply hang upon his neck."

"Well," said John, "it's a point of view."

"I just want you to understand this," said Monica urgently, "I'm not at all like Sally."

"I am sure of it."

"Be serious. I won't have you feel about me as Bob will feel about Sally in a few weeks from now. I'm not saying you ought to go to the war. That's your affair. But if ever you think of it, Ken, let it also occur to you that I'm——"

She paused.

"Well, " asked John.

"That I'm willing," Monica concluded.

There was a long silence.

"Do you think I ought to go?" John said at last.

"It is for you now and always to decide. I just want you to say at once that you won't think of me as being in the way."

John sipped his cocoa and thoughtfully picked his words:

"This is how I see it at present—as near as I can tell—I must have a very strong motive for going before I can rightly go. The ordinary motives are not enough. I must have something more than the wish not to be out of things, or the liking for a change, or the desire to stand well with people, or to see what's going on, or test myself in something new. These motives would be good enough supposing——"

"Well?"

"If it were not for you."

"Put me out of it."

"It isn't possible. My motive for going to the war has to be something which will outweigh all this"—he swept his arm comprehensively round the room.

Monica looked at him and dropped her eyes.

"Your country, Kenneth," she whispered.

"I don't feel it like that—not yet. If I were to go now I might call it that; but it would really be a dozen things besides—selfish things—some of the things I have just mentioned. I should like to walk about in khaki, and write letters home from the front. I should like to find out what

danger feels like. I should like to know that I was taking part in a big thing."

"Very well, Kenneth. Why don't you go?"

"No, Monica, I must go differently from that. I'm a good deal short of a hero, but I'm at least a peg above jobbing myself into the army—they wouldn't look at me in the ordinary way—simply to do a Cook's tour of the Great European War."

Whereupon the subject dropped, and John helped himself carefully to some more biscuits.

IV

CHEMISTRY AND AN EXPLOSION

UPON a morning not long after the meeting in Mortimer Street Jimmy Pelham lay on the sofa after breakfast at eleven in the morning, reading a volume of his own poems. His rooms, looking out on Piccadilly and the Park, were thinly but choicely furnished. Clearly nothing had been allowed to arrive in them by accident or by contract with the wholesale provider. A diorite statuette by Jacob Epstein, a few drawings of Augustus John and some very expensive eighteenth century engravings declared an occupier who attended personally to his buying and selling.

Pelham was reading a document with a history. It was the poem which had severed his married life with Diana. Pelham had been married at twenty-five and privately separated at twenty-seven. The separation had followed a very contentious discussion of the verses with which Pelham was now engrossed.

It was entitled *The Chemistry of Love*. A young lover in the heat of his passion is supposed suddenly to inquire what precisely was the physiological chemistry of the reactions which mentally were so disturbing.

He had read the poem to Diana, and she had immediately said:

"Well, Jimmy, if that's how you think about me I am going straight back to my mother."

This had not, of course, been a sudden decision on the part of Diana. It was prepared and expected. The breach had begun almost as soon as Pelham had recovered from the honeymoon. Those first weeks had been perfect, for Pelham and Diana were equally deep in love.

Then, because they profoundly and selfishly loved one another, they had begun to quarrel.

One evening Pelham had discovered a lovely sunset—not an orthodox sunset of reds and purples, but a subdued study in grey and green. He asked for sympathy, but Diana, who had never seen anything like it at Burlington House, who, moreover, wanted her dinner, and was inclined on principle to be jealous of Pelham's tendency to be interested in things inanimate, had made fun of his "silly old sunset," and left him to admire it by himself.

This was the beginning of Pelham's bitter realisation that a woman can be everything to a man and yet be wholly indifferent to many of his ideas and likings. Hardly had they got home to their house in Kensington than Diana began to cover his walls with oleographs that made him angry, and with furniture which broke his spirit. He found popular novels on his table. Whenever he went to the player-piano he had to hunt out his Borodin or Bach from *The Night of the Party* or *Dreaming of Thee*.

It was not as if Diana were meek and ready to learn. She was far from that. When he tried to educate her she told him outright that there were big things and little things, and that he paid too much attention to the little things.

She meant by this that if Pelham came home and found her waiting to greet him in an audacious new dress which left her unusually accessible, he would often as not ignore her lovely arms and notice that she was reading the poems of Ella Wheeler Wilcox. Then, when he really wanted to kiss her, she would say to him sarcastically:

"You are quite sure I'm not out of drawing, Jim?"

Then he would deny himself, and they would be miserable.

Pelham, as he read *The Chemistry of Love* could remember a hundred such incidents—the worst incident of all being the poem itself. He had read it to her out of bravado, knowing it expressed what she hated most in him—his craving to analyse and search into all his feelings and thoughts, his inability to take pleasure in anything of which he could not see the smallest detail and implication. The poem had raised in Diana a passion which frightened him. How dared he read that poem to her (she had stormed)? It was disgusting. Could he not take her and be thankful, without wondering what was inside her? It made her sick. She would never speak to him again.

Pelham remembered how at that moment he had been almost ashamed of himself. Diana's anger had been so very fine.

And, when Diana had really left him, he had suddenly felt that art for art's sake did not quite fill the big house in Kensington. So he sent the keys to Diana, and moved into Piccadilly, where he lived with beautiful furniture and could play all day long the ironical music of M. Ravel.

As time went on he had become secretly more ashamed of himself, and openly more defiant. Diana had said that when he apologised for won-

dering what was inside her she would come back and be a good wife to him. Pelham was frequently tempted to send to her; but there were principles at stake, and he had always held that principles were important.

During the last week he had been reading the newspapers, and he had perceived that principles might easily become a snare. Pelham had imagination, and he had lived in Germany. Instinctively he had already taken a fairly true measure of the task that lay before the country. They would soon be fighting for their lives. Every phrase, habit, and category would have to be discarded which impeded the fighting athleticism of the nation. Pelham could not have stated in precise terms what he meant by this. He only knew that certain attitudes and speeches of his old acquaintances, that the views of a large section of the Press and of many public men whom he heard discussing the general position jarred upon him.

How did this apply to himself? He was asking this question to-day with his fingers between the leaves of *The Chemistry of Love*. Was he, as well as the politicians (he always thought of them as "the politicians"), also called upon to change his ways?

He had dedicated himself to Art. He had believed in being international, and in the excellence of contemplation. He spoke half-a-dozen languages; some of his best friends lived in Munich and Vienna; and he thought of soldiers as deedy men who got in the way of progress. He believed in the perfectibility of mankind, and he had proclaimed a time when crude things like war and starvation would not exist.

He had sacrificed Diana to his sensitive temperament and to his conviction that Art mattered more than anything in the world, even though he knew instinctively that Diana had been the biggest fact in his life, and now he was wondering whether he should also have to sacrifice to Art and to his personal creed this other instinctive knowledge that for him the war loomed larger than anything he had yet encountered.

He threw down the book and walked to the window.

"Oh, curse it," he said, "curse everything."

Since Diana had left him he had acquired the habit of thinking aloud, and it usually ended in a comprehensive impatience. It seemed inevitable that logic and intuition should pull him like the horses which killed Ravailac. Logic drove him

from the war as it had driven him from Diana. Perhaps, after all, there was something wrong with logic. There must be something wrong with motives which required him to turn from the two things which seemed most urgently to claim him.

"Jimmy," he said, addressing his shadow on the floor, "the infernal point is this: Are you an artist or are you really a good husband and a soldier? I am not a good husband because I won't apologise to Di—and how on earth can I ever hope to be a good soldier? I've always said that war is a filthy business, and I'm ready to smash the head of anybody who talks nonsense about its heroism and moral splendour."

At this point Pelham saw that his man was waiting at the door. Sands had often found his master arguing hotly with himself, and Pelham usually blushed when he was thus detected.

"Well, Sands, what is it?"

It was Diana coming up in the lift.

If Diana had arrived without notice Pelham would probably have kissed her; but, being announced, she was no longer Diana, but a problem. He stood awkwardly in the middle of the room and looked at her. It was the first time they had met since the separation.

"He hasn't a word for me," said Diana impersonally to the ceiling when Sands had left them together.

It had once been great fun to talk of one another in the third person. But Pelham was too seriously inspired for any such playful indirection.

"I've been thinking about you," he said. "It's time we had a talk."

"You're not going to apologise?" she asked.

"Don't put it so crudely, Di."

"It's the only way I understand it."

He crossed to her and took her by the arms. She looked very splendid in the sunlight.

"Can't we make it up?" he suggested.

She did not answer, but looked round the room and said inconsequently:

"What a cheerless-looking place. Why don't you have some curtains?"

He dropped her arms.

"You know I hate bits of rag about," he said testily. "What's wrong with the window panes?"

"You see, Jim," she said, "it simply won't do. We start bickering at once. Besides you've been reading that nasty poem."

She tapped the book with her foot where Pelham had thrown it.

They neither of them spoke for a moment. Then Pelham said slowly:

"Evidently you haven't come to make peace."

"No. I've come to talk about the war."

"You too?"

"Naturally. What else is there?"

"I suppose," said Pelham, grievously at fault, "you've come to advise me."

"That's your egotism, Jimmy. I've come because I don't want to lose touch with you. After all, we're friends. Everyone is so unsettled now. I want to know where exactly you are going to be."

"This is my address," said Pelham curtly.

"That is all I wanted to know," said Diana, and started to the door.

Pelham thought he saw contempt in her eyes. This had the effect of stiffening his perversity.

"So you did come to advise me after all," he said in the way she hated most in him.

She turned in a flash.

"No man wants advice at this time. I came to tell you that I'm going to the front almost at once with Lady Penley's Red Cross unit. I'm fully trained, as you know."

"Very well," said Pelham acidly. "I shall read all about it in *The Lady's Field*."

"This isn't a picnic; we're going to work," said Diana.

Her breath was coming short. Pelham was conscious of an unruly impulse to jump at her. He wanted to embrace even her anger. He also felt ashamed of his remark about *The Lady's Field*. At least he must apologise for that.

"Di," he said, "I've made a very mean remark. I'm sorry."

Then he added in a burst of anxiety:

"For God's sake, Di, take care of yourself."

It was now Diana's turn to say the wrong thing.

"We don't all think about that."

Pelham suddenly paled and his blue eyes kindled like points of light upon a taper.

"Hit me!" cried Diana in an agony of contrition. "Why don't you hit me?"

Pelham controlled himself.

"That's all right," he said. "The fact is we've both got the devil of a temper."

There was a short silence. Then Diana took her bag from the table and hesitated.

"You've really made up your mind, Jim?" she said at last.

"I'm not going to be frightened into joining the army, if that's what you mean. I've never

been afraid of anything in my life, and I'm not going to be afraid of this."

Rhetoric now began to work in Jimmy's brain.

"There are thousands of women like you, Diana. They are going to divide men into two classes—those who go to the war and the other fellows. Well I'm not afraid of that sort of hysteria. That kind of thing will keep a good many decent men out of the war and it will drive in whole herds of sheep."

"Including my two brothers and most of your own friends."

Pelham had now so far recovered his equanimity as to be annoyed that his speech should be interrupted.

"That doesn't follow at all," he said testily. "You miss the point."

Then Diana summed everything up in a way she had.

"This isn't a time for points," she said. "I'll leave all the points with you."

V

CHALLENGING THE MAJORITY

DIANA had then and there departed, and Pelham could find little comfort in the points she had so scornfully left in his keeping. He gnawed the whole matter over afresh. At last, when he had decided by all the rules that the war was no concern of his, he went to the club for lunch and caught himself straining to hear what a General was saying to some young officers at the next table.

In the smoking-room he met a man who wrote for a Pacifist review. This man had exactly the same convictions as Pelham. He had often said that War must shortly make way for Arbitration in the settlement of human differences. He did not believe in frontiers. He believed in the goodness of men. He looked forward to a general sheathing of the tooth and claw. Pelham had said these things himself. But this man, unlike Pelham, was unable to grasp a fact. Virtually he did not believe there was a war. There must be

some mistake somewhere. He resented the news about the butcheries in Belgium. Something must have gone wrong with the telegraph wires. This sort of thing would be over in a few months. It was too terrible to last. Millions of men could not go on killing millions of men, because it was natural for men to love one another. He talked to Pelham about armament contractors and the Prussian military caste. This war was nothing to do with the people. He supposed we had to make some sort of military demonstration; but the enemy would soon consent to retire, and then they could resume their life of humanity and peace. Meantime would Pelham join a small committee which was considering how at the earliest moment to promote a lasting peace in the interests of the democratic powers?

It was not pleasant for Pelham to hear his own arguments put at a maximum. He was rude to his companion. He told him that the war would last at least two years; that he admired conscientious soldiers who did what they thought was required of them; that the war would quite possibly do the country a great deal of good; that a man who did not realise that the war was an immense and thrilling catastrophe which would awaken

and change the soul of Europe had no right to consider himself of any value to himself or to posterity; that the people who did not believe in war would do well to be inconspicuous and leave it to the people who liked fighting to save the country; that it might not be everyone's duty to fight the Germans, but that it was clearly everyone's duty not to get in the way.

When Pelham left the club he met a company of the Royal Fusiliers marching down Piccadilly to the drum and fife. He tried to think contemptuously of the routine which had turned them out in such perfection, but he was caught helplessly by the rhythm and style of their marching. Something lit in him. He felt a sob in the throat as they swung splendidly past. Dust and the smell of new leather was in his nostrils, and in his ears the thump and shrill of a commonplace tune.

The man next him on the kerb was fat and prosaic—a man surely beyond reach of things significant and high. But Pelham saw there were tears in his eyes.

The fat man suddenly took off his hat and shouted:

“God bless you, boys!”

The last of the soldiers moved away, and the

fat man looked after them with a shining regard. As Pelham turned from the road he heard the man muttering in deep distress:

"My God, if only I were young enough!"

His cry, absurdly issuing from so unlikely a man, haunted Pelham as he walked.

He crossed Piccadilly Circus in a dream. Leicester Square suggested the tune which had been played on the soldiers' fifes, and fortified Pelham in a resolution to be disgusted with the fat enthusiast. His tears had been simply an emotional self-indulgence. He was the sort of man who would go to patriotic plays while the war lasted and enjoy thrills of vicarious devotion as he read the newspapers. He would hold celebrations when the troops came back from the war, and invest in all the war loans with a feeling that, after all it was the substantial fellows at home, keeping the Government in pocket, who deserved best of their country.

Turning into Bedford Street, he saw Rupert Smith disappearing into Goff's. He followed him in and found that he was bidding himself to be lavishly accoutred.

"I was gazetted this morning," Rupert explained. "The 1st London R.F.A."

Pelham, filling with discontent, watched the exuberant purchasing of Smith—a revolver, sword, field-glasses and various uniforms.

Smith, he reflected, was one of those lucky men who always knew their minds. He invariably acted on the spur of the occasion, and was invariably sure, when everything was finished, that he had acted in, for him, the only possible way.

They walked away from Goff's, and went by agreement into a near café.

They were old friends, and did not speak until they had sat together for an appreciable time. It was Smith who spoke.

"Now, Jimmy," he said, glaring at Pelham's gloomy countenance, "tell me about it. The same old sickly conscience, I suppose?"

Smith bent over and put his hand on Pelham's arm.

"Give it up, Jimmy. Come to France. There's plenty of room."

Smith looked curiously at Pelham's clouded face. Pelham suddenly had a fanciful vision of himself, under the open sky, searching an imaginary horizon with field-glasses purchased from Messrs. Goff. Smith afterwards said that he had the face of St. Anthony in a crisis.

"What's keeping you?" Again it was Smith who spoke. "It isn't any of the old phrases, is it?"

Pelham shook his head.

"They are as dead for me as for you."

"Well, let's have it in plain terms."

"It will bore you," objected Pelham.

"I'll listen for an hour."

"The point is this," said Pelham, picking his words. "I have always protested against people who simply follow the other fellows. Your instinct, like that of most able-bodied young men of your class, is to get into khaki. My instinct is to be bitterly angry that things like art and literature are going to be put aside. My bent is not towards practical, obvious things. I have always said that the important things are things which distinguish one man from another; and I've always persisted in sticking to those things."

"Exactly," said Smith brutally. "That was how you lost Diana."

Pelham, though he affected to ignore this mortal thrust, was stung.

"What," he asked, "is the use of challenging the majority if immediately you are tested you admit that the majority is right? Everybody's

rushing madly into the war. I'm going to stay outside."

"It's sheer perversity, that's what it is," said Smith. "Why can't you consent to be ordinary? You know quite well that you—the real and essential 'you'—want to go to the war and to live happily with Diana. Why do you pretend to be different from everybody else when in this particular matter you're simply a normal chap like me and Rivers?"

"I am going to prove to you that I'm different by staying at home."

"You'd regret it all your life—if you could do it. But it's beyond you. The country needs you, Jimmy, and you won't be able to refuse."

Pelham slapped the table.

"If the country really needs me, let it say so in a clear and reasonable way. I'm not going to answer an advertisement. There is no duty at present upon any man except a duty to his own convictions. Service in the army is asserted to be spontaneous and voluntary, and I don't happen to be personally moved in that direction."

"H'm," said Smith, with a queer smile, "you take our political phrases very literally."

Pelham contemptuously stared out of his blue eyes.

"By voluntary service I suppose you mean service which is voluntary. The fighting is to be left to those who like it and believe in its moral grandeur."

"I'm afraid we mean nothing of the kind," said Smith decisively. "Voluntary service means that every young man is expected to do the right thing, and that no pressure will be spared to compel him to that end. You needn't go to the war unless you like, but if you don't go to the war you will be called a coward, and the women will be asked not to love you. Before we've done with you, Jimmy, you'll either have to enlist or wear a mark like the woman in *The Scarlet Letter*. We've only just begun to work the voluntary system, but I've already come upon some rather ingenious devices. I saw yesterday a whole battalion of sensitive young men with dependent families who thought they were enlisted for home defence. They were lined up in a public place, and the colonel asked all those men to stand forth from the ranks who were unwilling to risk their lives abroad on behalf of the country. Strange to say, not one of these young men was conspicu-

ously anxious to stand forth. The whole battalion will go to Flanders in due course; and the result will be talked of in certain newspapers as a free and spontaneous uprising of the people."

Pelham bounded in his chair.

"Don't talk your politics to me," he shouted. "They make me feel unclean."

"You're going to have a bad time in London, Jimmy."

"Nevertheless," said Pelham, "here I intend to stay. I refuse to go with the crowd just because it happens to be a bigger crowd than usual. As to your recruiting colonels and such-like, I promise you faithfully that, Pacifist as I am, I will black the eye of the first person, in uniform or out of it, who insults me."

"Well," said Smith, as he rose and looked for the waiter, "you'll come in your own time and not before. Meantime you can help me choose some blankets."

VI

RUTHLESS SUCCESS

THAT evening Rupert Smith dined with his parents in FitzJohn's Avenue. Mostly it was a formal matter. It is true that Rupert had for his mother a mild affection. But she never understood one serious word he said, and Rupert had on his side to take for granted the sentiments which his mother was quite unable to express. Mrs. Smith, in the eyes of her children, was never much more than an extension of their father.

Rupert, in common with the rest of the family, actively disliked his father. Mr. Smith had fourteen children, and all but two of them had avoided him as soon as they had reached an age to claim opinions of their own. He was now an old man, but the hard and assured tyranny of his manner was in no way impaired. His words were rapped out in the old crisp manner. He was an absolute law in his own house. In the old days he had been an equally absolute law in his workshops; but

infamous Truck and Factory Acts and aggressive trade unions had a little limited his rule. Nevertheless he thanked God that he still had the ability and spirit to deal strongly with his workpeople. He paid them less and got more out of them than any employer living.

He was a product of the hard individualism of the late century, curiously surviving into an epoch of model villages and state insurance. He kept to all the phrases. Let each man do what was right in his own eyes without reference to anyone else, and somehow the total result would be general prosperity and elevation of character. He would, had it been possible, have barricaded his household against the world and wielded over its members the ancient *patria potestas*. He would similarly have shut the gates of his workshops against all inspectors and combinations. He openly cursed the laws which crossed him.

He never explained things to his family. He announced his opinions, and let it be known that there was a door to his house for those who hesitated to accept them.

Rupert had been one of the first to take advantage of the indicated door. There was a night when Rupert had looked with blazing hatred into

his father's face. It now seemed long ago. He had left the house, and he had returned only when he had achieved the beginnings of fame and independence. His father at first refused to believe that he was actually making money by writing in the newspapers. Then he looked into the matter, and admitted that Rupert was justified. He respected anyone who kept his head above the industrial waters. He still told Rupert whenever they met that he was a young fool—the proof being that Rupert might be earning ten times as much money as his father's partner. But Rupert, having achieved independence, could smile at his father, and occasionally he would dine quarrelsome at the big house in FitzJohn's Avenue.

The partnership which Rupert had refused had been given to his younger brother. Except for Agnes, who did not count with her father, Henry was now the only child whom the old man had not yet driven into rebellion. Henry was an extremely able young man, who had hitherto successfully avoided hard thinking or any very clear idea as to what precisely he stood for. He had expensive tastes; and was not tempted to probe into the sources of his father's enormous wealth. He dignified the obvious cynicism of his

father's policy in their joint commercial undertakings by decking it in the fine, bold phrases of a dashing philosophy idly collected. He studied the great opportunists of history. He liked to think of himself as an industrial Cæsar crossing moral Rubicons. He saw himself winning practically beneficent triumphs over sentimental opponents whose timid altruism courted defeat from a bravely unscrupulous man of the hour. He studied the careers of the great Italian captains of the Renaissance, quoting Macchiavelli and Nietzsche. By this means, though he was quite a nice young man, he contrived to be a faithful partner and disciple of his father without being uneasy in his conscience.

His father gave to Henry the possessive and jealous affection which his other children had refused to receive. He looked forward to a day when Henry would be an industrial king, and strike hard blows in the drooping cause of the Individual Employer. He identified Henry with the ancient right of men with capital and brains to make money in their own way. He intended Henry to go into Parliament. Together they would start a movement on behalf of the Liberty of Trading. The time would come when the

country would tire of the expensive sentimentality which played with Socialism. Then Henry would make speeches in the House of Commons, and together they would buy the Government and obtain a free field to deal with labour in their own brave way.

Rupert, as he sat to-night with the remains of his family, saw the house in FitzJohn's Avenue as a rock islanded by a rising tide. His father talked, and his mother in a less degree, as though the war were a purely industrial event. Some men would be hard hit; others would multiply their profits. It would soon be finished, and then there would be a swingeing income tax.

They talked in a general way till it was time for Mrs. Smith and her daughter Agnes to be dismissed to the drawing-room. Mrs. Smith's dismissal was characteristic of the house. It consisted in a sudden silence of Mr. Smith, and a direct stare of his hard eyes, which plainly said:

"Why on earth doesn't that woman leave the room?"

Mrs. Smith would then rise without ill feeling. She was really quite happy with Mr. Smith, though she rather missed her children. She was equally amorphous in outline and character. She

gave you the impression that, if you hit her, you could not hurt her for very lack of resistance to the blow. This applied equally to her character and person.

But to-night she was just a little offended with Rupert. Rupert had said some very bitter things about the silly and selfish women who at the start of the war had stripped the shops in a panic, terrifying the poor, disorganising supplies and exhibiting a selfish preoccupation with keeping whatever wolf might appear from their own particular door.

Mr. Smith had thereupon roared with laughter, and turned, full of his joke, to Rupert:

"You should see what your mother has done with the attics," he said.

"She needn't do another bit of shopping for six months," he continued.

Then, when he had sufficiently enjoyed himself, he turned aggressively upon Rupert.

"Well, young feller, what was it you were going to say? Let's hear the rest of it. It will amuse your mother."

"I'm sorry, mother. But you needn't take it to yourself. I dare say," he added, with a glance at his father, "that it wasn't altogether your doing."

"Of course not," twinkled Mr. Smith. "It's father who buys the bacon."

"Well," said Mrs. Smith, placidly, "you did warn me not to run out of things."

"Rupert will tell you that that was very wicked of me."

"But surely, Rupert dear," protested Mrs. Smith, "it was my duty to see that there was food in the house."

Mrs. Smith would have been angry with Rupert if there were such a thing as anger in her nature.

"It's all right, mother," Rupert soothed, and the subject dropped.

Agnes had said nothing. She hardly uttered three words during the evening. Her position in the big house was curious. She was the only one of three sisters who remained, and she remained by virtue of an early acquired habit of outward obedience and a nervous distrust of the world outside. She appreciated the advantage of being comfortable and safe, of being respected in the shops, and under no anxiety for the future. Accordingly she had stifled something obscure in her which rebelled and she had refused the adventures into which her sisters had rushed. She stood in that shrunken home for the discipline and respect-



ability which her sisters had cast away. She pledged a younger generation to the creed of her father. Her father could not feel quite an anachronism so long as Henry abetted him, and Agnes outwardly accepted his will.

She was a handsome girl of three and twenty, who had hardly yet become aware of her sex. Her successful obedience—her astonishing consent to live entombed—was largely due to the way in which she had instinctively protected herself against all lawless and incalculable things. She shut herself away from life, finding in books and music the missing thrills of reality. Here she could adventure without peril. She could soar into a limitless world between well-cooked and substantial meals. Her rebellion had not taken the practical turn of falling in love with an ineligible suitor like her sister Mabel, or of insisting upon a right to be out after 9 P.M. like her sister May. She simply escaped to her room, and read Meredith or Zola. Her father had decided that Agnes was a meek young person who had little to say for herself and even less to think about. He considered that Agnes was quite successfully subdued. He had had his way with *her* at any rate. He did not realise that as yet there had been no real con-

flict between them. Agnes deliberately consented to conform outwardly in a way which made her virtually inaccessible to pressure. Agnes had not yet taken it into her head to want anything enough to fight for it. Meantime she practised the doctrine of Thomas Hobbes, purchasing freedom of will by an acquiescence which cost her little.

To-night Agnes was even more silent than usual. She would usually talk with Rupert. But she contributed no word at all—beyond the necessary chatter of the table.

When his mother had taken Agnes into the drawing-room Rupert accepted a cigar from his father. Mr. Smith still had small fits of chuckling. He liked nothing better than to see his family falling by the ears. It had been one of his chief amusements in former days to set his children furiously disputing one with another. Next to scoring from them himself he liked to see them scoring from one another. The cream of the jest this evening was that Rupert had nearly quarrelled with his mother, whom not even he had as yet succeeded in more than superficially ruffling.

As Rupert smoked his cigar in silence, he was

suddenly taken with a horror for the house in which he was born. Henry, who had been silent all through dinner, was looking out of the window. Rupert himself had often stood in that same place, and found the things he saw symbolic of all he detested in his father's character. The front door was approached by a tall flight of stone steps, each one of which was whitened each morning by a maid who lived beneath them in a Victorian basement. The place seemed designed for people who ate best butter in the dining-room, and fed the servants below upon margarine. The steps seemed expressly built for his father to descend in the morning to make money and to mount in the evening with a cheque-book in his pocket. At the side there was a mean little entrance where little boys brought joints of meat and vegetables. Inside the house everything was elaborately ugly—the kind of ugliness that has to be paid for.

Mr. Smith was proud of his house, and talked of his door as though beyond it security and comfort ceased. He regarded his house as the justification of his crude individualism. His creed was justified in that it would enable any energetic and sensible man to live in a house of that kind, with maids in the basement and a side entrance for the

butcher's boy—a house wherein the unbounded privileges of a father might lawfully be asserted; at whose threshold all public authority ceased.

Rupert hated the view from the window of that house—as all his brothers and sisters had hated it. In turn they had walked down those whitened steps, leaving the old man to a barren empire over his chairs and tables and over a wife who did not know she was being ruled. They wasted no sympathy on their father. Their father was impregnable in his pride and assurance.

He did not look like a man to be pitied. He enjoyed huge meals and drank with enjoyment. Any other man would have fattened degenerately, but Mr. Smith had never suffered for his appetite. The stern lines of his hard, ruddy face were as clean under the trimmed white beard as they were twenty and thirty years ago.

Yet Rupert was curiously moved to pity him to-night. His father had never known defeat or acknowledged an error; and it seemed to Rupert that the time had at last come when his citadels must fall. This big selfish house, all built out of profit and calculation, perched above its stone steps, the attics crammed with groceries, was essentially an anachronism. Nothing for which

it stood had any reference to the events which now were abroad.

"Well, Rupert," said Mr. Smith, helping himself to port, "you look as if you were sorry for yourself."

"No, father. I was thinking of you."

"Then drink some port, and be happy," said Mr. Smith, pushing over the decanter. "Henry will tell you we have had an excellent day."

"It doesn't seem to have exhilarated Henry," said Rupert, looking at the gloomy figure by the window. Henry was straining to catch the cry of a newspaper boy shouting something about a success of the Russians.

He turned upon Rupert from the window.

"We've made a cool fifty thousand pounds this morning," he said.

He flung the information defiantly at his brother, as though he were challenging the world to witness that he had done no wrong.

Rupert answered the challenge with his eyes.

"At whose expense?" he asked.

"Government's expense," chuckled Mr. Smith.

Rupert ignored his father. His brother shifted under Rupert's steady look.

"Well?" asked Henry abruptly. "What have you got to say about it?"

"On the face of it—only this," said Rupert. "The Government happens at this time to be the country, and the country is fighting for its life."

Mr. Smith rapped down his wine-glass on the table.

"That's enough," he said with a hard authority. "Keep your romantic notions for your books. They're wasted here."

Rupert turned to his father, and felt the old antagonism glowing steadily.

"There is no call for romantic notions," he said quietly, "I was simply wondering how Henry would defend himself."

"There is nothing to defend," Henry sullenly countered him. "We have given the Government better terms than they would have got from any other firm. We have halved our usual profits."

"In fact," said Mr. Smith, "we have combined patriotism with common-sense. We have saved the Government a cool fifty thousand pounds. Also Henry has forgotten to mention that we have pressed at least two hundred inefficient workmen into the army and filled up the shops with better men at reduced wages."

Rupert stared for a moment at his father, trying

hard to keep his anger cold. His father's mocking eyes openly challenged him to lose his temper.

"Admirable!" said Rupert at last; "so long as Henry is satisfied."

Then he walked to the door, and faced them for a minute before leaving the room.

"And now," he said, "I'll go and say good-bye to mother."

"Not a long good-bye, I hope," said his father, flicking the ash from his cigar. "You amuse me, Rupert."

"I am afraid it will be rather long," said Rupert quietly. "You evidently don't read the *Gazette*. I got my commission this morning."

Mr. Smith stared a moment at the door, then turned to the son he loved.

"That, Henry, is what actors call a *Curtain*."

But Henry seemed to be staring enviously at the closed door.

VII

DOOMED BY THE NEW ORDER

WHEN Rupert walked away from FitzJohn's Avenue that evening he felt as though he were coming out of the past into the present. His father's house was the symbol of a vanishing particularism. It represented a segregation of interest, a privacy and an independence exalted by easy living and prosperity into a shibboleth. Hitherto it had been an axiom that a man's life and fortune belonged only to himself. If Rupert had told his father that his ability and resources should be placed at the service of his country, that he should have insisted upon advising the Government without reward, and have refused all profit at a time when men were throwing their lives into the scale, Mr. Smith would have stared at him in amazement. Rupert wondered how long the new conceptions growing into the minds of all who at that time were young and accessible would take to effect an entrance into his father's house.

Would that hard old man ever be brought to acknowledge that the days of the separatist and the buccaneer were counted?

Rupert felt that destiny was waiting for his father. It would so obviously be just that the man who had taken his selfish will for sole arbiter and never once had quavered into any form of altruism should at last be compelled to acknowledge that a nation at war could not be indefinitely run upon those lines. But how was this justice to be administered? Rupert knew that his father would only barricade himself the more securely as the assault grew more insistent. He would lose no point of the game, and yield to nothing short of superior force.

At this point Rupert thought of his brother. Clearly Henry was not very successfully resisting the new influences. Already Henry was uneasy. Maxims and examples out of Italian philosophers and captains were a frail defence against a pricking conscience. Henry had so far been able to dignify his adherence to his father with ingenious and graceful excursions of the intellect. He had given to his industrial adventures a smack of the privateer. He thought of himself as the Englishman Italianate of the Elizabethan age, as a soldier of

fortune or as one who sailed for El Dorado. His room was beautiful with fine editions of Hakluyt. He thought of commerce in terms of piracy and war. Men struck for their own hand.

Rupert smiled to think how small a chance these dapper pretences of his brother would have against the battery of events to come. There was no real basis in Henry's character for the dashing cynicism he affected. He disliked the naked individualism of his father. So he dressed it in the finest costumes he could find for it out of history and romance.

Then there was Agnes. Rupert was very near to her in many ways. Her tastes had always run with his. They each had shared, in the days of bondage, a young passion for books and music. They had been more together than any other two members of the family. She was now the only sister within reach. Mabel was with her poor captain of Dragoons. May was earning business promotions in New York. His brothers were scattered over the world, lost in their several pursuits. Each had in turn been cut off with a thousand pounds, and was now putting it to uses more or less successful. Agnes remained.

Rupert disliked in Agnes the streak of cynicism

—the cynicism of an easy and sensuous nature—which enabled her to cling to the comfort and safety of FitzJohn's Avenue without any pricking of the heart. But he divined in her a sleeping courage which made her present contemptuous obedience seem somehow to belie her. How long would that obedience endure in the face of coming events—events which must necessarily reveal to her the deepness of the gulf between her father and herself? Her silence to-night had had in it an unusual constraint. Ordinarily her silence was the easy and inevitable silence of a person who prefers to listen and has no urgent thing to say. To-night it had seemed a brooding and a hostile silence.

Then, when Rupert had told them in the drawing-room that he had got his commission, and was going into camp on Friday, Agnes had flushed with pleasure, and had pressed his hands. He had left her as one whose thoughts had been turned inward.

Clearly there were rebellious influences at work in his father's house. But the new events would not be able to bend the set and stubborn mind of its ruler. In him the old generation was embodied—a generation bred up in traditions that now

were to be wholly changed. The future was with the young, frank, and supple men who were susceptible to revolution. Men of the older generation would have to change, or stiffly conform to necessities which they would continue to resent. If like his father, they were strong men,—self-willed and stubborn to resist—then they would in their pride of will be broken.

VIII

OLD DIFFERENCES

KENNETH JOHN was the secretary of a Junior Whip, a man whom the war had hit particularly hard. Julius Redway had been coming to the front upon the Government side with extreme rapidity in the last few years. He counted appreciably in the important domestic crisis which immediately preceded the war; and he was intimately acquainted with every factor in a problem which once had governed the political situation. A speech of Julius Redway was worth a special edition in the days before the war.

Then, so far as the public was concerned, Julius Redway disappeared. Only the clubs knew how hard he worked in the first terrible weeks of August. Redway had at once perceived that the old problems must be, not simply laid aside, but forgotten. He put his services frankly at the disposal of the Government in the difficult task—at times it seemed impossible—of persuading some

of the older people at Westminster that domestic controversy had to be postponed. When the memoirs of this generation can be published to the world without reserve, an amazed posterity will incredulously contemplate the political bitterness and distrust of those early days. The devoted work of some of the wiser men kept the rank and file of the sections from open bickering. But it was difficult to preserve even the armed neutrality of a party truce.

Julius Redway, in whipping small and disgruntled men into a reasonable attitude, owed much of his success to the fact that he himself could partly understand their point of view. He appreciated how difficult it was for men of middle age, absorbed in controversies which reached far back into their lives, committed for years to deep personal animosities, thinking naturally within established boundaries, suddenly to realise that what they understood as public life had virtually ceased to exist. Redway himself had spent one terrible night in which he had seen his own career tumble to nothing; and even now he, with many of the best men in politics, felt like a pugilist who had started to deliver a blow and realised before it got home that he was punching at the air. He

was still staggering in an effort to recover his balance.

Redway had succeeded, but there were scores of men who had failed. Redway wrestled with some of these men for their souls, and for the credit of his profession. He met them with patience and sympathy. He sometimes shivered to think how he himself might have fared had he been ten or fifteen years older, a little less gifted with humour and a sense of perspective, a little more practised in the art of believing what he wished to believe. The men with whom he talked supported their reluctance to clean the political slate with phrases and arguments which Redway himself would have considered to be unanswerable a few months ago.

With many men he completely failed—men in whom imagination and humour had been killed by long immersion in political disputing and intrigue. Mostly they were men of small but hard intelligence, crusted with old ways of thought and speech, incapable of readjusting their lives. They agreed ostensibly to put aside the matters which absorbed them before the war; but they still thought of these matters as being filed for reference, as being kept in a political cupboard to be taken

down and dealt with in the old familiar way when the war was finished. They admitted the war was a grave and terrible event, but they kept it as a thing apart from their political life. They resented its tendency to intrude and to imperil their notions. They did not allow the war to work like leaven in the brain. Each successive step of the Government towards claiming the services of the country on behalf of the country was received by them with a secret distrust.

In the first days of the war the efforts of the best men on both sides were all directed to preserve appearances. Redway worked night and day at nothing else. He was of opinion that his leaders tended to deal too gently with their least reputable followers. But he loyally addressed and exhorted the small men in his smoothest and most persuasive manner. Before every important debate he saw as many men as he could, using all the party pressure he could apply to keep them silent and benevolent.

Upon a morning early in the spring of 1915, Kenneth John sat with Redway in their room at Westminster, receiving his familiar instructions. Redway trusted a good deal in John's ability to convey in his letters the precise degree of firmness

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or suavity he needed. They had worked together for nearly three years, and John was able to catch his intentions from the briefest indications. Redway this morning was beginning to weary of his work. He listened as John reported upon the correspondence of the day with the faint disgust which leads rather to hopelessness than temper. John quickly and monotonously went on with his report:

L. B. wishes to be assured that his support of this afternoon's motion in no way prejudices the case against . . .

P. W. does not admit the necessity of conceding to the Opposition the principle of . . .

Sir Th. H. is of opinion that the war should not be permitted permanently to impair the prospects for . . .

Redway as he listened was busily unlocking memories of things he had read and heard from France in the last six months. These things were louder and more real than the voice of his secretary.

John finished abruptly and waited. Redway came from the window.

"We have had all this before," he said. "You can draft replies without instructions in detail from me. Deal carefully with L. B. Answer

him vaguely on six sheets of notepaper. He likes that sort of thing. Assure him that the Prime Minister has no intention of surrendering any of those historic principles with which the welfare and interest of the great party he is privileged to represent has been closely and inveterately identified. But put it more clumsily than that. L. B. suspects the *bona fides* of anything with less than half-a-dozen sub-relative clauses."

John made a brief note.

He was a model secretary. No trace of comment had ever appeared upon his face. He looked calmly for his instructions, asked some leading questions, and jotted industriously. Redway had often wondered what his secretary thought of him. Lately he hardly liked to wonder very far in that direction. John did not know it, but Redway admired him as an author. He found humour enough in John's writings to be at times a little nervous under his impassive looks.

This morning, as John snapped his notebook and made to go into his own room, Redway suddenly said:

"One moment, John. Suppose we talk a while."

John came back dutifully into the room.

"Business?" he asked.

"Not altogether. It has just struck me that you're younger than I am."

He paused, and then impulsively added:

"What do the young writing people think about all this?"

"All my friends but one have asked for commissions; and the exception proves the rule."

"Are you the exception, may I ask?" said Redway.

John, who was thinking of Pelham, flushed a little.

"I'm not eligible in the ordinary way," he said.

"But I'm open to advice."

"I'm not going to advise you," said Redway, with a smile. "I will simply point out that a good secretary and a thoughtful journalist is worth keeping in the country at this time. How do you feel about it?"

"I'm not exactly comfortable."

"This is alarming."

John smiled. "I'm not going to run away," he said. "If I pushed in now it wouldn't be from any sense of duty. It would be a sort of sky-larking."

Redway put his hand affectionately on John's shoulder.

"We'll talk about this again," he said. "I'd no idea you were taking things so seriously."

John, between the lines of his letters, thought now and then of this talk with Redway. Redway's last phrase rankled a little. Redway had dwelled on the word "seriously." John wondered if he had expressed himself badly. Had he seemed to lean towards the Pharisees?

He saw Redway again that afternoon when the letters were signed. The morning's talk had made an enormous difference in their relations. Redway frankly smiled as he signed the letter to Sir Th. H.

"You must find this rather amusing," he said, as he handed it back to John.

"That was six months ago. To-day it makes me furious."

Redway was startled by the vehemence of his secretary. John thought he saw an encouragement to go further yet. He tapped the letters in his hand.

"Good God, sir," he said, "how long are you going to stand this sort of thing?"

"That," said Redway, as he handed back the last of the letters, "might almost be called a leading question."

IX

A MAID AND A MAN IN KHAKI

THE morning after Redway's conversation with his secretary he was commissioned by the Government to dine with Mr. Smith at his house in Fitz-John's Avenue. It was one of Redway's unpleasant duties to keep in social touch with certain big employers. He sat at their tables as a missionary of public spirit. It was his task to bring home to them the need for co-operation and patriotism in their dealings. Mr. Smith was high upon the list of such men. He was at this time very necessary to the Government, and, so long as the Government respected Mr. Smith's claim to do what he liked with his own, it was also necessary for the Government to respect Mr. Smith.

Mr. Smith had frequently been lobbied, but never on so big a scale as since he became a purveyor to the Government at war. He had a grim contempt for the men who exercised upon him

their charm of manner. He saw through it all so clearly, and it amused him. It tickled the same sense of fun in him which liked to see his children disputing one with another.

Upon this particular evening he was unusually pleased at the prospect of entertaining a Junior Whip. He was to discuss patriotism, and common-sense, and he was to enjoy the fastidious disgust of a man he particularly disliked. He elaborately set the stage for his comedy. Rupert had written to his mother saying he had a few days' leave and would like to spend it at Fitz-John's Avenue. Rupert was thinking of Agnes, whose parting look on the night he was gazetted he had not been able to forget. Mr. Smith welcomed an opportunity of having khaki at the table. Not only was he assured in Rupert of an angry spectator, but it looked well to have a son quite obviously in the New Armies.

To heighten the effect he invited Rivers, now upon embarkation leave and staying with some relatives next door, to make one of the party. Rivers had long been gazetted, and was leaving for the front within three days. His qualifications as a linguist, an engineer, and an Oxford Terrier whose enthusiasm was a byword in several regular

messes had soon dropped him into an active service regiment.

Rivers, as a friend of Rupert since they were boys together, was as intimate with the Smiths as he cared to be. Since Rupert had left home their relations had been rare and distant. But sometimes he played tennis with Agnes. He had always frankly admired Agnes, but he feared her erudition in art and letters. Rivers was frankly athletic and pastoral.

Pelham's contempt for Rivers, lately expressed in the room at Mortimer Street, was natural but quite unjust. It was true that Rivers had shot lions in Africa, and was now going to shoot Germans in Flanders. But he did not call it a change of soul. He never worried to describe the things he did. It was a perfectly obvious and natural thing for him to push immediately into the army. He had not thought twice about it. He had the forthright character of the Englishman who has lived mostly in the open air. He did not think of himself as patriotic or talk at all of his country. He was going into a necessary and possibly exciting business without fuss or any great elation.

Rivers was the first to arrive this evening. Mrs. Smith was being pinned together upstairs,

and Agnes was alone in the drawing-room. They had not met since the war began.

Agnes had that afternoon been visiting a lady novelist who gave literary teas. She had not enjoyed the conversation. It had formerly thrilled her to hear familiarly of public people whose royalties were as immense as their talents. But the most original remarks of her clever friends had this afternoon failed to amuse her.

She was thinking of her literary tea when Rivers was announced. Her discontent had sounded a depth which dismayed her. All the things she had built about her as a shield in her father's house—her music, her books, her love of comfort and beautiful clothes, her security and self-sufficient tillage of the mind—seemed to have lost their efficacy. She was sensible to-night only of being in her father's house—of having implicitly consented to be barred out of the world into which her sisters had escaped. She had made believe with things of the imagination, and had taken the edge from her revolt with soft and secure living. She was beginning to find herself out. Her father's conversations with Henry—to which she was now an absorbed listener—stimulated her anger. Though she continued to be silent from

habit, and outwardly things went on as before, Agnes knew that for her the time was coming to follow her sisters. Something was shut out of the house in FitzJohn's Avenue—something she needed to find.

It was something which entered with Rivers. She realised it as he came to meet her down the whole length of the long room. It was the first time anything suggestive of the New England had entered into that house. His coming affected Agnes in a way that alarmed her. She had always assumed with Rivers a slightly superior way. He so clearly wondered at her familiarity with things mysterious to him. He had in her presence the diffidence of a boy in the presence of a woman whom he had always unquestionably accepted as too beautiful for words. Agnes to-night knew in a flash that this superiority had vanished. To assume it now would, she felt, have been hateful. She smiled in contempt of her vanished airs.

Rivers noted the smile and took it for himself. He had lately thought a good deal about Agnes. Though he had not thought twice about joining the army, he had inevitably been brought sharply up against the things which mattered most to him in the last few months. Among those things

was his shy and desultory friendship with Agnes. At least he would require her good wishes.

He would require even more than that. He realised it now.

He did not see the dejected and fastened spirit of Agnes. He saw her as very remote, waiting to receive one of the least important guests of the evening. He saw also the smiling contempt upon her face—contempt for herself. He accepted it as addressed to his brand-new uniform.

When Agnes came eagerly forward and clasped his hand as though she welcomed him from the heart, he ascribed it to her politeness.

"Very awkward, you know," he said, still thinking of her smile. "Positively the first time I've had on this particular outfit."

"Are you apologising?" she asked, wondering at his tone.

"I was answering the smile. I suppose I do look a bit odd in all these new straps."

"Bob!" cried Agnes in such dismay that he opened his eyes. Then she put her hand upon his sleeve.

"That smile wasn't meant for you, Bob. Please don't think it——"

Agnes was unable to go on. The strain of living

within herself during the last weeks had worn her nerves. This sudden sharpening of the contrast between her old superiority—a superiority still accepted by her companion—and her inward abasement was too much for her. Her lip trembled and she left her words foolishly in the air.

Rivers suddenly lost his sense of her as a remote and very wonderfully dressed daughter of the house. He saw now only her face—struggling with some sort of emotion of which he apparently was the cause. He put his hand over hers, which lay upon his sleeve.

“Why, Agnes, what’s the matter?” he asked.

Agnes was staring at the sleeve of his coat with that sense of crisis which suddenly imprints little things irrelevantly upon the mind. She tried to find words to cover the break in her voice; but her attention was stupidly held by the single star upon his sleeve.

“What is that funny little blob?” she heard herself say.

The tension broke.

“Oh, that?” said Rivers with a laugh. “That means that I’m of the lowest possible rank that an officer can be.”

Then the inconsequence of the question struck

him. He looked curiously at Agnes, whose eyes were lowered. Her whole demeanour puzzled him.

"What's all this about?" he suddenly said.

"I mean," he continued, startled a little by his own audacity, "you seem just a bit upset."

Agnes looked at him.

"It's this," she said, "I want you to know that I think you're simply splendid."

This was for Rivers quite a new idea. He even wondered whether she were making fun of him. Then he saw there were tears. He was thrilled with a sense of something passing between them—something simple which he entirely understood, but could not express. He tried to speak, but was struck helpless by a surprised concentration of all his faculties upon a revelation. He must be in love with Agnes. He moved towards her.

Then, into the circuit of their intercourse, intruded the disagreeable voice of Mr. Smith.

"How d'ye do, Rivers?" it said.

Mr. Smith was already beside them. To Agnes it seemed he must have seen what had happened.

Rivers heard himself talking politely to Mr. Smith and Agnes left them to warn her mother that it was time to appear. When she came back

with her mother Rupert and Henry were present, and almost immediately Redway was announced.

The dinner which followed disappointed Mr. Smith. He seemed curiously unable to assert himself. Redway was less respectful than a Junior Whip should be. He encouraged Rupert and Rivers to talk military matters, and seemed almost to assume that the dinner was intended as a khaki celebration in their honour. Mrs. Smith beamed openly in her non-committal way upon the boys in uniform; and Agnes behaved in a most extraordinary fashion. Ordinarily she was silent and indifferent to what was said. To-night she drank flamboyantly of the best claret, talked with a flushed and dishevelled enthusiasm to Rupert, and was seized with sudden fits of silence which positively glowed as if from internal sources. Henry confined himself to the smallest talk.

Redway was too greatly interested in the currents he divined to be flowing under the surface of their conversation to be greatly disturbed by the veiled provocations continually offered by his host. Mr. Smith had intended this dinner to be a festival for his own honour and amusement. But it was nothing of the kind. Redway disregarded him. Agnes refused to allow her high

spirits to be checked. (He wondered if her riotous behaviour had anything to do with Rivers. This must be looked into.) Rupert, repeatedly challenged, did not even trouble to dispute with him. Rivers met his veiled satire, not in the least understanding it, with frank good humour. Finally Mrs. Smith three times failed to catch her husband's eye when he desired the ladies to retire. She was learning how to distinguish a Lieutenant-Colonel from a Colonel.

By the time Mrs. Smith had taken Agnes into the drawing-room Mr. Smith was secretly enraged. He felt obscurely out of things.

His instinct was sound, erring only in not perceiving the degree of his remoteness. Agnes, in her gaiety and spasmodic fervour, was outwardly changed, and this her father could well enough perceive. But he had a very inadequate idea of all that was a-throe in her. She sat wrestling to keep her amazing new happiness from breaking out into an open and foolish display. After months of depression, in which she had seemed to be held in a cage which contracted upon her, she had suddenly, in blundering against the bars, flung open a gate into the air. She was hardly conscious of what she said or did. Everything she heard or

saw was like a gauze or transparency floating between her and this transfiguration of her inner life. When her father made one of his characteristic attempts to draw her into a disputation (he did this systematically because normally she liked to be silent) she seemed to be viewing him from the wrong end of a telescope. He had become small and far away. She curtly evaded him and continued to chatter with Rupert. Now and then she looked at Rivers, and found that his eyes were frankly searching her. Then, intolerably happy, she turned away and sprinted with Rupert into nonsense.

Rivers, on his part, was possessed with simply one idea. He wanted to be assured that he had not been dreaming. Had his moment of divination anything to go upon? He talked; and his food was gradually removed. But a smothered argument was swinging this way and that in his mind. He loved Agnes, and he had seen tears in her eyes. Was there anything else? He looked towards her for confirmation. She was drinking a lot of claret and talking at a great rate with her brother, and her eyes were shining. He wondered if the dinner would never end.

So far as Mr. Smith was concerned, Rivers was

not much better than Agnes. They seemed to be equally beyond his reach.

Then there was Redway. Redway had come to-night to show Mr. Smith the steel beneath the velvet of the Government. He was deliberately less agreeable than usual. It was his mission to-night to alarm, but not on any account to estrange, Mr. Smith, and he was inclined at times to improve on his instructions.

This more particularly appeared when Mrs. Smith had taken Agnes into the drawing-room. They were discussing an afternoon's debate in the House of Commons. An attack had been made on certain employers of labour, and Redway, seizing the opportunity he was waiting for, challenged Mr. Smith directly.

"Confess," he said, "that the attack was better justified than the Government was able to admit. The rigours of business cannot now be pleaded against the public interest. If profits are too closely pursued they will have to be checked by law."

Mr. Smith stared at Redway. Here was a Government emissary, from whom he had expected nothing but complaisance, talking like a socialist.

"Is this you, Redway?" he asked, with a keen look of his hard blue eyes. "Or is it the Party?"

"It is the country, and the war, and the general position. We cannot long avoid acting on the assumption that in every direction private interest will have to be squared with what the country needs."

"I don't find this in any of the Government speeches," objected Mr. Smith.

"It was said," Rupert interjected.

"Any young fool can say things," retorted his father.

Redway smiled happily upon Rupert.

"Watch the young fools," he said to his host. "They will have a good deal to say in the time to come, more especially the young fools in khaki. They will be in touch with the new notions which this war will bring into the country. You and I," he amiably continued, ignoring the stiffening of Mr. Smith, "stand for the old order of things. It won't be easy for some of us to change."

"How deep"—it was Henry who, to his father's surprise, now intervened—"will these changes go?"

It seemed as if he were asking this of himself rather than of Redway.

Mr. Smith laughed without enthusiasm.

"I take it," he said, chinking his syllables, "that there will still be buying and selling, and things like five per cent. and bills of exchange."

Henry moved uneasily as his father spoke, and this was not lost upon Redway.

"The Junior Partner is beginning to be pricked," he thought.

"There is no doubt at all of the buying and selling," he said aloud. "We shall soon be spending over three millions a day."

Henry seemed suddenly to come to a decision. He leaned forward between Redway and his father.

"How, practically, will the changes come?" he asked.

"Overwork," commented his father silently. He made a mental note that Henry must have a holiday. He remembered that Henry had lately been taciturn and pale, and had shown but little pride in his undertakings. Redway looked for a moment at Henry, noting his taut anxiety. Henry had the appearance of a man who desired reinforcement for his better angel.

"They can come in two ways," said Redway deliberately. "Either everyone will suddenly realise for himself that private affairs are no longer

possible, or there will have to be Acts of Parliament."

"For example?"

"Take industry. Perhaps our workers will instinctively feel that it is not possible at this time to strike for their class, and perhaps our employers will instinctively feel that big war profits are disloyal. The thing may come about quite naturally."

"Does the Government," Mr. Smith asked with a cutting restraint of his temper, "think that the country can be successfully run on terms that will deny to its industries a fair profit?"

"I hope we are all ready to make sacrifices."

"I'm an old-fashioned man," said Mr. Smith. "I think the best way to serve the general interest is to look to the soundness of one's own affairs. Patriotism that cannot be made to pay will end by ruining the country. I'm not going to help win the war by running into bankruptcy."

"I'm afraid it is hardly within the control of any single person to be bankrupt or flourishing. It depends on the solvency of the country. There is no limited liability."

"But in practice," urgently insisted Henry. "How in practice are we to decide what to do?"

"I was under the impression," said Mr. Smith, coldly regarding his son, "that we had decided already. We have given the Government good terms and we are transacting business as usual."

Redway pointedly ignored Mr. Smith. He turned to Henry.

"We shall easily decide what to do," he said, "if the spirit is right. But there are old habits to be discarded. If we cannot discard them spontaneously for ourselves, necessity will drive the Government into some sort of action. We shall have to prohibit strikes, limit profits, take over the workshops, fix wages by arbitration, restrain prices, and pool the country's resources on behalf of the state—there will be no end to it."

Mr. Smith set down his glass.

"Is this your private opinion?" he asked point-blank of Redway. "Or is it a threat?"

"It is a point of view which appeals every day to a greater number of people."

"Who are these people?"

"The people who are most closely in touch with the problems lying ahead of us. This war is going to be largely a war of material. We have been trying to get the material by contract with private firms. The success of this experiment depended

on a complete disappearance of class feeling and competition. There had to be no disputing between capital and labour, and no rivalry of profiteers. There are signs that the private shops are failing. They may have to be turned into Government shops."

"In a word," said Henry, as though he were driven to admit a truth he had long resisted, "there cannot be business as usual."

"There can be no business which is not the nation's business. Decent men cannot read the Roll of Honour in the morning and haggle for a penny an hour in the afternoon."

Rupert and Rivers were now talking apart. Henry sat back in his chair in a way which suggested that for him the discussion was finished.

Mr. Smith realised that he had received a warning, and began from that moment to regard Redway as an enemy to be treated with caution. Mr. Smith kept his bad temper for his friends and acquaintances. In business he was cool and coldly agreeable. The fact that Redway had now become his enemy had the instant effect of making him less quarrelsome.

To-night, moreover, he was at a disadvantage. He did not know exactly how much was behind

Redway's exalted sentiments. Had the Government any practicable plans? He was too old a campaigner to fling himself violently against a position which he had not personally reconnoitred. He would say no more for the present.

To Redway, with a sudden affability, he remarked:

"There is, of course, a good deal in what you say. Shall we go into the drawing-room?"

X

LOVE AND A TENNIS NET

IN the drawing-room Agnes was playing the piano. Her father noted the immediate sweep of her eyes in search of Rivers. Rivers also noted it, and the silent doubt of his late impatient moments in the dining-room was obliterated. He wondered how he could contrive to get a few moments alone with her.

By request she played the tune of *Tipperary*. Rupert and Redway made it the text of a conversation. Even here it seemed to Mr. Smith that he was being indirectly threatened. The talk was all of enormous changes in the outlook of all kinds of people.

"Six months ago," Rupert was saying, "I should have strongly objected to *Tipperary*. The soldiers have improved it by exchanging the music hall whine for a military beat, but it is hardly yet an æsthetic masterpiece."

"Nevertheless——" Redway suggested.

"Nevertheless," Rupert continued, "it has taken into action the finest army we ever made, and the tune means so much to us now that it often makes us wonder what sort of prigs we were six months ago."

"It's all a matter of perspective," said Redway. "Six months ago a commonplace musical cadence seriously mattered to some of us."

"Play it again, Agnes," said Rupert, "just the tune; none of your stylish embellishments."

Agnes, as she played it, saw a company of dusty men singing it very quietly as they marched past her waiting car. It was knit in her memory with the first stir in her of emotions which to-night were supreme. She finished the tune very quietly and sat in a heavy silence after she had finished.

Agnes raised her eyes from the keys, and abruptly turned to Rivers:

"Bob," she said, "I want to show you how the gardener has hung the tennis net. I'm sure it's not high enough."

She all at once had felt it was absurd to wait and to manœuvre for the meeting they both desired. The people who stood between them were shadows to be ignored.

Rivers was for an instant staggered by the

directness of her appeal. Then he boisterously accepted it.

Agnes was conscious, as they walked across the lawn, that her father was watching her from the window. They halted beside the net, and for the first time Rivers looked long and openly at Agnes for confirmation of his dream. Already it was too dark to see her very clearly, but her face was thrown into relief by the lighted window. It caught the same beam which lit the flowers of a large chrysanthemum.

He had no doubt of her from the moment he looked. Her eyes seemed to shine by their own light.

"I can hardly believe it is true," he said. He shook with the novelty of the thing.

They felt the presence of the lighted window. They moved instinctively into the shadow. Agnes slipped towards him. To Rivers it seemed that the wet earth and smells of the garden, the drops shaken from the trees by the wind, were part of their story. These things lived for days to come in his memory with the splashes of light upon the grass, the sense of a brief and perilous privacy, and the leaf which fell upon her face as she lay with her head thrown back upon his arm. Her passion

almost frightened him. Her first confession had come to him in tears, and there was the hysteria of nerves tried to breaking in her present attitude. She lay rigidly clutching his coat with her eyes closed.

A heavier gust than usual shook the trees. The cold drops fell upon her shoulders. Rivers, whose consciousness was minutely recording every small thing, felt the water spatter on to her arm between his fingers. It sensitised him to her warmth and her light pressure. The night air seemed suddenly to threaten her.

"We must go in," he said, shy of any spoken endearment.

She drew herself away from him.

"Bob dear, when will you have to go?"

"I've got three days."

They were silent a moment. Then he said suddenly:

"Why didn't we find this out before?"

"I could not wish to find you in a better way. Bob darling, I am too happy. You can't know what this means to me. You have given me a part in the new life."

If anyone had talked like this to Rivers yesterday he would have thought it was intended to be

obscurely humorous. Now he simply accepted the position.

They were approaching the lighted windows. He stopped a moment to think of a practical way of meeting.

"Rupert has a tea-party in Mortimer Street to-morrow," he said. "Come early and we can talk before the others turn up. I'll tell Rupert about it."

Agnes shivered slightly at this. To-morrow would be the first of three remaining days. She would then be alone again in her father's house.

"I'll be there at three o'clock," she said.

When they entered the drawing-room Redway had already started to leave. Mr. Smith was speeding him with a smooth cordiality which boded ill for the future. Henry had said good-night to Redway and was now deeply retired within a remote corner of the room.

Redway warmly shook hands with Rivers, God speeding him to France. Agnes felt the eyes of her father searching her as the near departure of Rivers was mentioned.

When Redway had left the house Rupert, after a short and homely talk with his mother, challenged

Rivers to see him on his way. He was spending the night in Mortimer Street. Rivers, whom Mr. Smith had already begun to transfix for examination, was glad to get away. Agnes, fearing to trust her nerves under the probing of her father, had said good-night.

Outside the house Rupert lost no time in coming to the point with Rivers.

As they went down the familiar steps, and Rivers was wondering how to disburthen his mighty news, Rupert squeezed his arm, and, to his friend's amazement, said:

"Bob, you're a lucky fellow. She's worth two of any one of us. If I'd ever had the sense to hope for anything so splendid, I should have prayed that you two would some day feel about one another as you feel to-night."

"Good God," ejaculated Rivers. "Is it as plain as that?"

"I should think it was. Even Redway noticed it."

They walked on in silence for a moment with arms linked.

"When are you meeting her again," Rupert asked at length.

"That's just the point. I thought she might

come early to our tea-party to-morrow. What do you say?"

Rupert again squeezed his arm.

"I'm simply delighted."

"I may as well tell you," he went on, after Rivers, as his way was, had failed to express himself, "I came to dinner to-night simply to see Agnes. She's been having a poor time lately, and I was getting anxious about her. My idea was to get her to myself this evening, and talk to her. But I soon saw that that wasn't my business any longer."

"I suppose," said Rivers, with the air of making a deep discovery, "that she isn't altogether in touch just now with her—with your—with Mr. Smith."

Rupert laughed. "Bob," he said, "love is giving you a wonderful perspicacity. I am glad to think that my wicked old father is coming to judgment. Agnes was bound to run down the steps of his house before very long. She will now defy him and be happy and save her soul. I even begin to perceive signs of conscience in Henry. Then there is Redway. Thank heaven for Redway. You heard him to-night. But of course you didn't. Father has seen the writing on the wall. He has had a good run, but the rope at last is short."

Rupert Smith, of the Royal Field Artillery, flung his cap into the air.

"What on earth are you talking about?" asked Rivers in amazement.

"Bob," said Rupert very gravely, "you have just three days to get Agnes out of that infernal house. It will be the best work you will ever do. You will never know how good it is."

"If it's anything to make Agnes happy I shall certainly know how good it is."

"Happy!" exploded Rupert. "Thank heaven there are better things in life than being happy."

He turned to Rivers, and with deep feeling pressed his hand.

"Bob," he said, "I think you love Agnes. Well, so do I, and I tell you this. The Agnes we love has only just begun to be alive. It has been your privilege to save all that was worth while in her—all that was really Agnes."

"I'm dashed," said Rivers, staring at his friend.

Then, as Rupert made towards the "Under ground," he shouted:

"You're not going to leave me, Rupert?"

"Why not?"

"I've such heaps to tell you. It was I who intended to do the talking."

Rupert poked at him with his umbrella.

"Think better of it, dear chap. You're a most incompetent talker. I've done all the talking that is necessary, and I'll expect you to-morrow at three o'clock."

XI

TWO MINDS AND ONE THOUGHT

AGNES, at about half-past two on the following day in Mortimer Street, was delighted with the freedom of her progress. She had rarely come into town on foot. She had never visited Mortimer Street. London for her was the theatre by motor car, Selfridge's, and walks in Hampstead and St. John's Wood. Goodge Street station was now the gateway of her emancipation. The stalls of vegetables, fish, old iron, and petticoats in Charlotte Street were her first free glimpse into life.

Rupert had often described the shop—a shop where terrifying surgical instruments were displayed—above which he lived. From the door she could see the great flag of the Red Cross floating above the Middlesex Hospital. This, and a huge notice in the window of the shop itself to the effect that every grade of outfit for field hospitals could there be obtained, created about the place what Rupert had described as a homely and persuasive atmosphere of enlistment.

Rupert's enthusiastic welcome made her feel just a little ashamed of the reserve which had hitherto kept them apart. Rupert had always treated her as though he were waiting for a confidence which was denied him. She had suppressed in herself the things which drew them together.

"Bob has told you?" she asked him when he had put her into the chair behind the tea-table.

"On the contrary," said Rupert. "It was I who did all the talking."

"I'm sure it was," she said, with a happy laugh.

"The point is," said Rupert, "where are you going to live. It's no use bickering along with father. My idea is that you should have these rooms till something else turns up. Mrs. Baines, who looks after me, would not usually accept the charge of a 'lady,' but she will do it now, at first for my sake, and afterwards for yours."

"Would it be respectable?"

"Mrs. Baines will see to that."

"When are you leaving?"

"I've got to report myself to-morrow. You can move in as soon as you like."

He paused a moment.

"I suppose," he continued, "that you and Bob

haven't yet thought of getting married. That will be later on."

Agnes flushed.

"Rupert," she said, "if only Bob would think of it. Could it be done, do you think, in the time? I should be happier to let him go."

Rupert was surprised by his sister's vehemence.

"Suppose we look it up," he said, crossing to his book-shelf. "Or perhaps we might consult Mrs. Baines."

Mrs. Baines, when she came with high plates of bread and butter, at once pointed out that marriage by publication of the banns was not possible in two days. There were certain irregular courses of which she had heard, but she was not at all clear as to the time required. A neighbour of hers had been married after some three weeks of mysterious negotiation with an official who had a room at the police court. Her name had been placarded with others for all the district to view. Mrs. Baines did not approve of this.

"In Mrs. Baines," said Rupert when she had left them, "we have drawn a blank. I wonder if it would be in *The Statesman's Year Book*."

They found it at last in a *Short History of the Law of Contract*.

"It seems," said Rupert, after a careful reading of some extremely close print, "that you and Bob are just in time to be married by licence before the Registrar. The thing now is to convince Bob that it can be done. What do you bet he doesn't mention it himself?"

Rivers was already on the stairs. He came into the room. Rupert edged discreetly towards his bedroom. Rivers rounded upon him at once.

"You're not going, are you, Rupert?" he asked with a cheerful tact.

"Not altogether," said Rupert evasively. "If you want my advice about anything I shall not be far away."

Rivers, alone with Agnes, felt at first strangely remote from her. He could hardly believe that he had so familiarly held her yesterday in the garden. They were almost equally shy.

"This, Bob," said Agnes at last, as he sat on the arm of her chair, "is the first of our two days."

Rivers was silent a moment. Then he violently gripped her hand.

"I've been thinking, dear. Suppose we—I mean—what would you say—the fact is—there's just time for us to be married. I don't know how it strikes you. I might get pipped, you know. And

it would be something. It would help me no end out there to think of us as in a way belonging together. It's a bit selfish. What do you think?"

Agnes smiled as he wrestled with his sentiments.

"So you think it's selfish, Bob?" she said when he seemed to have reached an end. "Now shall I tell you what I think? I think you're a bat. Don't you realise that, now I have so much, I want just everything. I want to have a claim upon you stronger than all the others."

"But you have that already. Surely a fellow's girl——"

"A fellow's girl," she laughed; "—someone he fancies he knows and who fancies she knows him. I think," she quaintly added, "that when it is really put to you you will acknowledge that a fellow's wife must necessarily be more to him and to herself than a fellow's girl."

Rivers looked at her. It all now seemed very obvious, and he was strangely moved by it. He became curiously aware of something in her which desired to be his. Her sudden scorn for their present tentative communion promised him a revelation infinitely rich when their love had more intimately been tested. He said quite simply:

"Then it's all right, darling?"



"Yes, it's perfectly all right."

They talked after that of ways and means, and Rupert was called into consultation. Rivers arranged to get the licence in the morning. They would be married at the Hampstead office on the following day. Rupert would then be away, but John could be asked to act as a witness with Mrs. Baines.

John arrived shortly after this, with Monica. Rupert had that morning asked him to bring Monica to keep Agnes in countenance. Agnes was the first woman to breach the monastic pale of Mortimer Street. After John came Ponsonby, already back from the front with interesting abrasions of the scalp. Last of all Pelham appeared at the door—completing the group as far as any group of young men in London could now be completed.

Pelham was obviously checked at the sight of Agnes and Monica.

"Come right in," Rupert called. "I think you know my sister."

"Well enough to be shocked," said Pelham, bowing awkwardly towards Agnes. "I thought that in these rooms we were cenobites, and stylites, and eremites and celibates."

"All those rules were made before the war," said Smith.

"I'm sorry, Jim," said Monica, who knew Pelham rather well. "I know how precious to men is the practice of excluding women from their serious conversation."

Pelham raised his eyebrows.

"I suppose," he said distastefully, "we shall soon be answering to pet names."

"Don't grouse, Pelham. Come and help with the tea," said Smith. "We have some news for you," he added.

"So I observe," said Pelham, indicating the back of Rivers, now deeply retired into a private talk with Agnes.

"When did it happen?" he asked.

"Quite recently," said Smith.

"I see. It's a war match."

"Jimmy," said Rupert briefly, "say nothing, and take this tea to Ponsonby."

"Well, Pelham," said Ponsonby cheerfully, as Pelham handed over the cup, "how's your soul?"

"None the better for meeting you," Pelham growled.

"There's a remedy, James," said Ponsonby.

"We've an interpreting job in our brigade. You'd forget all about your soul out there."

Pelham turned to Smith.

"Is this a recruiting meeting or a tea-party?" he asked.

"Pelham," said Rupert severely, "we know about your sufferings. Control yourself."

"The fact is," said Monica, offering him cake, "James expected to find an audience, and he is disappointed. We've come to listen to Captain Ponsonby."

Then a remarkable thing happened. Ponsonby had never yet refused an audience. But this afternoon he was sheepish. He would not say a word about the fighting. He had been mentioned in dispatches for conspicuous gallantry; and Pelham made ready to endure the hero who is also an historian. But Ponsonby disappointed him. Soon, indeed, Ponsonby was talking in, for Ponsonby, a most amazing way. He said that men did not refer to these things, or think about them. They just happened. Men hated them to be remembered or discussed. He himself had suddenly lost his head in quite a primitive way. He had discovered later that he had, at some risk, saved the life of his

colonel, and killed an enemy. He seemed ashamed of it.

Pelham blankly stared at him. Pelham had seemed to foresee exactly how Ponsonby would allude to his share in the war—how, with a charming modesty entirely aware of itself, he would depreciate his small services; how he would report, with a half-humorous detachment, that of course he felt a bit nervous to begin with, but how “one gets used to that sort of thing, don’t-you-know”; how he would refer with a vague discretion to advice and conversation shared with this or that distinguished officer-in-command.

But Ponsonby was changed. There was no doubt of it. The pose had gone out of him. He seemed quite careless of the impression he made. When Pelham tried to draw him into heroic tales he became morose.

“James,” he snapped at last, “I was once a chronicle; but it was years ago. I shall never do it again.”

“But war,” said Rupert, “what is war? We want to know.”

“I can’t tell you that. I can only tell you what are the trimmings of war. There’s dirt, and vermin, and bad smells, and waiting for your meals, and

getting bored to death, and angry with noise and cold. Those are the things one can talk about. They aren't the important things."

He would say no more than that. But he was thinking of a friend, no longer to be recognised, carried up out of the trenches clenching his teeth with pain and telling the subalterns to "carry on"; of a late orderly, full of exasperating high spirits and Cockney slang, who had got upon his nerves one day till he had vehemently cursed him, and of the hysterical tears he had shed later over his twisted body; of his own shameful speculations as to whether his thirst for distinction would be strong enough to overcome his very definite reluctance to risk a final exit from the stage; and of his quick sense, after he had looked war in the face, that neither his thirst nor his fear weighed with him at all, but only a quiet hope that he would be worthy of simple fellowship with men who had died or were beside him now, counting upon his partnership. Ponsonby had beheld his vain self wither and perish. He had gone out to fight, eager to enrich his personality with new experiences and sensations, impelled by a wish to be proud of himself. Then, all at once, he had discovered himself to be doing things without the old inevitable seat

reserved in his consciousness for an applauding onlooker. He had not seen himself at all in the deed which was mentioned in dispatches. He received his congratulations with a sense of shame. It seemed indecent that he should be asked to wear the laurel, even, as he said, on behalf of all the brave unnamed. These laurels were against the spirit of their enterprise. They made him feel like a small boy, conscious of being no better than he should be, but cited before his fellows as a model of virtue. They stood for a personal distinction he had never sought. The words of the dispatch—"Lt. Ponsonby at once decided, in the face of almost certain death, to make a last attempt . . ."—these words did not in any sense correspond with the truth. He had decided nothing. He had seen something to be done—a thing such as his comrades were doing daily without a thought—and he, equally without a thought, had done it. He just happened to be there.

It was Pelham who most obstinately pursued him this afternoon. Pelham wanted to be sure that Ponsonby's conversion was less complete than it seemed. The conversion of Ponsonby made the war more than ever formidable to his peace of mind. Pelham sought with so much energy to be

reassured that Rupert at last intervened on Ponsonby's behalf.

"Jimmy," he said, "it would doubtless comfort you to find that Ponsonby is still exactly as he used to be; but in your anxiety to be soothed your manners are not nice. It's obvious to everyone but you that Ponsonby does not want to talk."

"Manners indeed," said Pelham. "There was a time, a happy time, when there was no such thing as manners in Mortimer Street."

"I'm sure," said Monica, "we don't want to introduce them, do we, Agnes? Manners were invented by men to keep women in order."

"If you must be clever," said Pelham in a tired voice, "you might do something better than a clumsy paraphrase of Meredith."

"What did Meredith say?" asked Monica, who always pretended to Pelham she never read anything.

Pelham was drawn. He was drawn further than was comfortable for anyone.

"Meredith said that woman would be the last creature to be civilised by man. It seems that is now an official opinion. Is your best boy in khaki, what? We're inclined, for the moment, to abolish the male Press Gang. We leave it to the women."

Two Minds and One Thought III

"You see," said Monica to Agnes, "what it means to come to the rooms of a bachelor. We hear the truth about ourselves."

"It's very interesting," said Agnes shyly. She had never heard anything in the least resembling all this. She was rapt by its brutality.

Then Monica turned upon Pelham. Monica had a rough way with men who seemed to require it. She talked to them very privately—but in public. John, who was quiet and diplomatic in his more intimate approaches, always rather dreaded Monica's bursts of candour. He realised that one of them was at this moment due.

He pulled out his watch.

"Monica," he suggested, "it's half-past four."

"In a moment, Ken," she answered. "I'm anxious about James. He seems unhappy."

"Not at all," said Pelham shortly. "Listen to your husband. He says it is half-past four."

"But I'm anxious about you," gently persisted Monica. "You're behaving in the oddest way."

"Instance?" Pelham inquired.

"Soon after you came into the room," said Monica, "you gave us very aggressively to understand that the war was not your affair. Yet you

have spent half your time talking about it yourself, and the other half trying to make Captain Ponsonby talk about it. It seems to me that the war is on your mind."

"On my mind?" Pelham almost shouted. "Is it surprising that it's on my mind? I offered my seat to a woman this morning in the Tube. She said she only accepted seats from gentlemen in khaki. I came up into the street and met a sandwich man. The board on his stomach suggested that I was not as brave as I might be, and the board on his back asked what my children would be likely to think of their civilian father in the years to come."

"If you feel it so badly, why don't you enlist?" asked Monica. "It's the obvious thing."

"I've no talent for the obvious thing," said Pelham curtly.

"Don't lose your temper, James," said Monica. She spoke like an indulgent nurse. "Obviously you can't endure to be a civilian, so why don't you enlist?"

"You miss the point." Pelham was now in a white heat of rage. There were times when he hated Monica. He hated her especially when she shrugged her shoulders.

She shrugged her shoulders now. "Point!" she exclaimed.

The encounter between Monica and Pelham was beginning to shape like a personal fray. Rupert felt it was time to intervene.

"Isn't this all rather unnecessary?" he asked. He looked as he spoke at Pelham.

"Ask Monica," said Pelham.

"Jimmy," Rupert gently persisted, "it isn't your business to govern the country. Let the political people decide how they are going to raise our armies. Your job is to decide for yourself."

"But they don't let me decide for myself," said Pelham. "They cant at me from every corner of the street. I am free to choose; but I must choose as they advise me to choose."

"Who is canting at you?" asked Ponsonby. "Is it cant to suggest that it's a fellow's duty to turn out?"

"But that is precisely what they don't suggest," said Pelham. "If only they would say it outright and in an Act of Parliament, I would gladly——"

"Gladly!" interrupted Ponsonby. "This seems to be an advance."

"Not at all," retorted Pelham. "So long as the war is a matter of personal taste it isn't my affair."

If, on the other hand, it were a matter of public duty I should naturally do what I was told to do."

There was a short silence. John again pulled at his watch.

"You haven't a leg to stand on, Jimmy." It was John who spoke, as he rose to go.

"John," said Pelham, "you say little enough as a rule, and it is usually time to go when you say it. Do you intend seriously to intervene, or is this good-afternoon?"

"I stand here for the facts," said John. "There are three men in this room who have joined the army, in spite of the fact that they all consider the present system of recruiting to be vile—all except Rivers, who doesn't think at all."

"To tell the truth," said Rivers, "I don't quite see what all this is about. Somebody's got to pull out the chestnuts, and the fellows who don't lend a hand don't count. It's always like that. Of course this advertising and all that—some of it's about the limit. But that's not my affair. It's nothing to do with me."

"Good for Bobby! That is almost a speech," laughed Rupert.

"It's good enough," said John. "It makes it

fairly clear that some men join the army without greatly worrying how they got there. You are a logician, James, therefore be logical. You object to pressure scientifically applied to sensitive young men in order to drive them into a 'voluntary' army. Very well. We agree that the pressure is nasty, and that some of it is rather absurd. You have two alternative remedies. Either you can refuse with dignity to be coerced, or you can indulge in a free and spontaneous uprising of Pelham, and enlist in the army. There is no middle way. The war matters to you personally or it doesn't. If it matters, get as soon as you can into khaki. If it doesn't matter, go home and play the piano. Your present conduct is neither one thing nor the other. You allow yourself to be worried and enraged by a persecution to which, on your own showing, every man of spirit should be indifferent. I advise you to go into the country where the posters cease from troubling."

"That," said Pelham to the company, indicating John as he accompanied Monica to the door, "is what is usually described as an old head upon young shoulders."

The talk died down after John and Monica had gone. Pelham and Ponsonby left the house to-

gether, Pelham wishing to assure Ponsonby that he bore no malice.

Rupert then left his sister and Rivers to themselves. They spent a happy hour—an hour which was mainly silent, but, for Agnes, thronged with new thoughts. The careless and frank bluntness of her new friends was to her a startling revelation of the possibilities of human intercourse. She felt that life was before her. The coming loss of the man she loved was yet but the faintest of shadows in a far corner. She was for the moment engrossed by the novelties of an existence enriched upon every side with unsuspected treasures of mind and heart. There was also secretly at work, threading the strange new sense of adventure to which she yielded, an almost physical unrest—something which shook her to the heart, and smouldered in her eyes whenever she became conscious of the intimacy and silence of the room.

They talked of their coming marriage, in the vein of their first approach that afternoon. They talked of it, that is to say, as an affair of sentiment and high privilege. Then, as the shadows deepened, they were silent again; and to Rivers it seemed as though Agnes were about to be richly changed. She seemed to be waiting. They gradu-

ally became more tremulously aware of one another than they had ever been before.

Afterwards they each remembered a moment of still surprise. It had come as the climax of their sympathy, and it gave to their relations an urgency not felt before. Hours later, when Agnes lay in her room, stretched and still, it again intruded into her thought of the marriage which was distant from her now by only a day's breadth. It gave to her thoughts a direction which added a fresh significance to that event—thoughts which held her breathless.

XII

A CAMPAIGN TO ROUSE THE COUNTRY

UPON the morning after the tea-party in Mortimer Street John was walking, not very briskly or happily, down Whitehall. It was a bright February day which in the fullness of its light and colour permitted one to overlook even the sanguine recruiting posters upon Scotland Yard. It is not easy for a healthy young man to be wretched shortly after breakfast when the sun is warm and the air has a February bite; but John, nevertheless, was thoroughly dejected. He could find no reasonable excuse for himself. He had newly come to a reckoning which he regarded as a final and sensible end to all his doubts. He had definitely ascertained by personal application that he was not in the ordinary way eligible for service in the army; and he had accepted the assurances of his chief and of his friends that his present work was as useful as any employment at or near the front could be into which he might conceivably be

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jobbed. There was no reason for his present unsettled condition, or the sense which possessed him that with each sunny minute that passed he was somehow losing caste.

"I'm envious," John told himself as he turned into Redway's rooms opposite the Victoria Tower; "that's what's the matter with me. I'm like the majority of small men who can't see the Victoria Tower at fifty yards. I'm panting for military glory, and instead of making myself cheerfully useful at something I can do, I want to be the hero of a tale by Rudyard Kipling. I must take some of the medicine I recommended to Pelham yesterday. I must really make up my mind."

He put these thoughts away from him as he sifted Redway's correspondence, but an interim discussion was going on continually under the cover of his actual employment—a discussion which occasionally came to the surface in unuttered phrases.

Kenneth John had had an evil three days. Rupert had gone to the front. He had read of a rival novelist gazetted to a divisional staff. He was to act to-morrow afternoon at the wedding of his friend Rivers, who was leaving for France in the morning. He had thought chafingly of the way

in which all these lives were to be enriched. He even wondered again whether he might not push himself somehow into a breach.

This was an old, and he had coolly decided that it was an ignoble, prompting. He was obviously, so long as Redway was useful to the Government, of more value as a confidential secretary than as an officer jobbed into the firing line without any special call. The war did not present itself to him as an opportunity for sacrifice, but as a glittering lure. When he had, that morning, turned away from his farewell to Rupert, he had suddenly remembered a long forgotten and very poignant sensation of his childhood when he had been brought by his parents to see the Lord Mayor's procession, but had arrived too late. He keenly recalled his childish tears of vexation and thwarted excitement as he had stood screaming upon the pavement of a back street, too far away to see anything except the heads of the mounted policemen. Each fresh outburst of the brass bands and the cheering of the people had drawn from him fresh wails of agony, just as to-day he suffered cumulative twinges as each of his friends or acquaintances passed away to the war.

A little later John went into his chief's room for

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the morning interview; it was always a relief to talk with Redway. Redway so clearly assumed that John was a useful member.

But Redway, this morning, did not appear to be making any serious preparation for work. Redway's temper had been uncertain of late. He found his duties as political persuader continually more intolerable; and several times in the last few weeks he had hinted to his secretary that junior whipping was a waste of energy.

This morning, however, he was almost radiant. John, after waiting for instructions which did not seem to be forthcoming, at last ventured to interrupt the happy thoughts of his employer.

"The news," he suggested, "is good this morning?"

Redway was grave in a moment.

"On the contrary. You have seen for yourself that the news is bad. However, I've got something for you personally."

"Something that pleases you?"

"Something that relieves me enormously," said Redway. "There's to be no more junior whipping."

"You're giving up your work?"

"We'll call it a change of employment."

John's thoughts were instantly flung back into

an old and familiar confusion. His position was overturned. Redway's work was now his only serious employment, for he had broken with the journal for which he had lately written. He did not believe, as his editor required him to believe, that the war would be over in August. He jumped at the open door offered him by Redway's announcement.

"This," he said, "leaves me, I take it, free for other work."

Redway, reading his secretary, smiled and said:

"On the contrary. I'm going to talk to you for an hour. At the end of that time you will realise that I've got you faster than ever. I will help you to find a place at the war, if you like. But if you go to the war, you will go, in my opinion, as a deserter."

Redway was entirely frank as to his motives for throwing up his present employment. There had lately become apparent a clear division in public opinion. There were those who held that the war could be fought without any drastic changes, who held to old sayings, and would only be driven to any sort of compulsory organisation as a last resort. It was this party which for the moment had the upper hand.

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Others were beginning to ask important questions. How long would an unregimented personal enthusiasm stand the terrible strain which would shortly be put upon it? How was it possible for men who were bred in a rivalry of classes, who were safe from immediate harm, and earning better wages than ever in their lives before, to realise what the war implied? Could we continue to fight the war with an army of gallant adventurers? How were the suspicious and undisciplined workers of the country to be brought to see that their work belonged no longer to themselves? How were masters and men, enemies for a generation, to be brought to regard themselves as friends and partners? Could we continue to regard unlimited service to the country as something heroic, capricious, and exceptional?

The general political attitude to all these questions was to answer them opportunely, one by one, as they arose. If there were difficulties, industrial or military, let them be dealt with as they came. Let men be raised from day to day as they were wanted. Let industrial services be claimed by law only when they could no longer be obtained in other ways. Let there be special legislation, if necessary, for the factories, for the

armies, for the easing or postponement of civil liabilities.

Redway dissented from this. He desired to see the general principle affirmed that the lives and fortunes of every citizen belonged of right to the country. He held that, if this general point of view were declared in a law of general and obligatory national service, every other difficulty would disappear. The greater discipline would include the less. The community—industrial, capitalist or military—would be, in atmosphere and intention, a national army. Profiteering, striking, and the pull, in all classes, between private and public motives would disappear. Redway, though he did not insanely desire to see every man a soldier, strongly held that the industrial and the military problem alike could only be solved by declaring the moral liability of every eligible man to serve the country in arms.

Redway did not believe that labour could be disciplined by special legislation aimed at the factories. Already there was talk of this among those who saw symptoms of the breaking down of the private contract system of supplying the armies. But Redway could not understand how it would be possible to exact from specified trades an obliga-

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tion which was not imposed on the public at large. Either it was the duty of every man to put aside his individual interests or it was not. If the duty were asserted, it must be asserted generally and in its most elementary form. The miners or makers of munitions could not justly be compelled to serve in the mines or shops by civil or military penalties aimed specifically at themselves alone. They could be mobilised only upon equal terms with all other citizens. There could, in reason, be no special compulsion of a citizen simply as a miner. The only possible compulsion in a democratic country was the accepted discipline of a nation in arms.

In practice this amounted to universal military service, not because every man would have to fight, but because every man must learn to regard himself as a fighter. The country could best be regimented from the military side, the duty of every man in the last resort to defend his country in arms being the most elementary form of citizenship, from which every other degree and kind of service was naturally derived. Only thus, Redway believed, could the Government avert in time the clashing and disputing of interests and classes. In no other way could any sort of discipline be asserted with-

out bitter misunderstandings, without invidious, spasmodic and sectional tyrannies which might bring the country to the edge of revolution.

Redway put his views at a maximum as he walked in a growing excitement up and down the little room in Westminster. He pointed to evidence already in being of the things he feared. In the absence of any clear understanding that all work at this time was national work, the old conditions of labour against capital held. The contractors were full of business, and their men suspected enormous profits. Already the men were demanding that labour should have its share. There was disputing and cessation of work. There was, moreover, a disastrously rigid insistence upon the trade union discipline which insisted that everyone should labour according to strict limits of time and output. The nemesis of a vile period was at hand—a period in which workers stinted their work to defeat the profiteering of masters who stinted their wages. Nothing short of a thorough application of the ideal of national service could root out the prejudices and feuds of a generation—feuds which had taken from the workmen all pride in their work and from the

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employers all sense of responsibility for the well-being of their men.

Several ministers in the Cabinet had long been vaguely apprehensive that private contracting was at this time a blunder which might have to be lavishly atoned for in blood and treasure; but they had the intelligence to see that the alternative of discipline and regimentation must begin with obligatory military service—an approach barred by fierce political prejudice and an uncertainty as to how the country would receive it. They had consented with misgivings to the experiment of private contract.

Redway was unable to consent. He had decided that he could be more usefully employed as an unofficial prophet of discipline. There was at that time no single person or party to set forth consistently and without reserve the case for compulsion. Speakers and writers played with the idea, discreetly threw out opportunities for the public to express its views, and occasionally considered some aspect of the question. But this was done with care to keep open a way of retreat from an unpopular position; and the most important points, in Redway's opinion, had not been examined at all. The interdependence of civil and military obliga-

tion—the key to the whole position—had not been publicly recognised. Only the more obvious evils of the privateering system had been noticed, such as the devastating enlistment of men who at home were worth ten soldiers in the field, or the expensive publicity and feline pressure of the recruiting methods.

The plan for which Redway required the help of his secretary had to do with a weekly review of which he was proposing to become a rather more active proprietor. He invited John to help him as a skilled journalist in the prosecution of a new campaign. Their review would stand unofficially for the party of discipline. It was already a journal carefully watched by the Press as representing the views of an increasing number of politicians. It would henceforth serve the double purpose of forming and testing public opinion.

John listened to Redway for an hour. Redway's diagnosis coincided with his own less knowledgeable views. Already one thing was clear. He was held faster than ever before in London. The work he was offered, so far as journalism was of any value at all at that time, was of the first importance. There was a short silence when Redway had finished.

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"Well," asked Redway at last, "what is it going to be? I'll put it to you quite frankly. I want a man who will devotedly repeat himself once a week. We have to tell the public continually the same things; we have to tell them every Saturday that the war is life and death, that nothing can be as usual. It will be dull work; and it will make you many enemies of your own craft. I shall require you to chasten your naturally brilliant style for fear that our ideas may fall under suspicion by being too cleverly put. You will have to reiterate our main contentions till they become meaningless to you, and till you begin to believe in the other side. Moreover, you will never have the least chance of seeing anything of the war. The war, so far as you are concerned, will be mainly a newspaper controversy. What do you say?"

"You put it attractively," said John, with a wry smile. "I'll consider myself definitely out of things."

Redway pressed his arm affectionately.

"Then that's that," he said. "I'll take you round and introduce you to my man of straw."

John, as Redway made ready to accompany him, bade a last farewell to his military career.

He was lost in a contemplation of innumerable articles, written with conviction and no pleasure at all—anonymous, elderly and persuasive.

Redway, struggling into his coat, noted John's dismal expression and exhorted him:

"It can't be as bad as that," he said. "You look as if I had buried you. Come out into the sun."

They left the building and walked towards Charing Cross.

"What will my position be in this affair?" asked John, after they had gone some way in silence.

"You will have to take charge of your editor," said Redway. "It will not be difficult. He's not really interested in the war, and he will be glad to be relieved of his politics. He will despise you, and he will leave you entirely alone. He will suspect that I have put you in charge for some crooked design in pursuit of my own political advancement, and he will leave us to do our own dark work in our own illiterate way."

They waited at Downing Street as a Minister passed them in his car. He nodded to Redway.

"There goes a man who will be grateful to us," said Redway, as they went on. "He is not a happy man; and he is unable to make his distress tell sufficiently upon his colleagues."

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"When do we start?"

"At once," said Redway. "Already we have a theme. You've heard of this strike at Smith's works?"

"I have seen it mentioned."

"It is a test. I have dined with Smith. He is playing entirely for his own hand, and he has naturally come up against his men straight away. You know him?"

"Hardly," said John. "I only know him from the point of view of his son Rupert."

"He's a very strong old man. He stands deliberately and consciously for the thing we have to destroy. In a way I rather admire him. He is unique in being thoroughly aware of what he is doing. There are hundreds who will act as he acts, but they will think they are helping to save the country."

"You have studied him?"

"It was when I was dining with Smith that I finally realised how useless it was for me to continue my junior whipping. It is impossible to deal with Smith till we have roused the country. Smith cannot be persuaded and he cannot be compelled. Still less can we hope to persuade or to compel Smith's men. You can of course make it

illegal to strike and you can fine the men five pounds a day. But you cannot exact the penalty. Besides there is no sanction or principle or justice in coercing Smith or his men unless the country at large has been put most strictly upon its honour."

They walked on, deep in this theme, and with every step of the way John found himself more obviously committed to his new work.

XIII

A FRUSTRATED MARRIAGE

AGNES and Rivers had quickly arranged the details of their wedding. Agnes was to take possession of her brother's rooms as soon as Rivers had departed for Folkestone. They spent some fast hours of preparation, and Rivers, on the morning before the wedding, decided that they had time for a holiday. Agnes decided to put off the farewell scene with her father.

Rivers proposed a visit to the river, and they were soon at lunch in a punt upon the almost deserted river.

Agnes had not consciously avoided her father during the last twenty-four hours. He simply had not occurred to her. She had suddenly come out into a sunlight which made her old existence indistinguishably dark. She could not regard as at all belonging to her the years that went before these last vivid hours with Rivers. All the old things that had ruled and mattered were now obscure.

Of Rivers she became more intensely conscious every hour—of his strength and radiant health, of his simple delight in her, of her own desire to make their last moments together as perfect for him as possible. This thought grew for her almost an obsession. It seemed somehow to be her share in the sacrifice he was making—a sacrifice of which he was so entirely unaware.

Rivers, on his side, was dazzled by the thrilling complaisance of a woman in whose presence he would normally have chosen to feel an inarticulate humility.

"It beats me," he said at last, after one of her many expressions of pride in him. They were moored in a lovely reach of the river and he was uncorking cider.

"What is it that beats you?" she asked him, with a happy laugh. "You see, Bob, there are so many things. You are too fond of saying that things beat you. I don't believe they do really."

"Well, here's something that does," said Rivers decidedly. "It beats me to know exactly how you make me out a wonder. It makes me nervous."

"But why?" asked Agnes, with a mouthful of lobster.

"Well, I simply can't live up to it—that's all.

One of these days I shall come off the pediment, and you'll be crying over the pieces."

"You're not on a pediment at all, dear."

"And I love you," she added, with an abandoned zest in the phrase.

Rivers felt the whip of passion behind this sudden confession, and he flushed. He could not for the world have said these things himself. He was as yet shy of his love. The audacity of Agnes thrilled him the more violently as it tore away reserves which he wished away but had not the courage to approach. He was glad even now that intense preoccupation with a cork allowed him to ignore the tension.

This tension grew unevenly as the day wore, receding during intervals of pure merriment and delight in the golden weather, but intruding when silence shut them in. At those times Agnes became quite painfully aware of his nearness as he leaned beside her in the punt.

Rivers picked up some letters at his rooms, where they had some tea; and he ordered by telephone an early dinner at a riverside hotel between Richmond and Twickenham. From Richmond they started back to Twickenham. Rivers now gave all his attention to the punt, and

they made fair progress. Agnes listened for a quiet hour to the swish and fuss of the water under their bow. She could not tire of the driving stroke of the pole as Rivers thrust it rhythmically forward. She liked to have his vigour thus at her service.

They reached the hotel for dinner in excellent time. Agnes in the following hour felt her happiness pulsing like an echo of the strokes that had driven them to this enchanted place. Their window gave upon the river. Noises of the water, of passing boats, and conversation at a near table soothed rather than troubled their privacy. They entirely lost their shyness. The long day in the air, the warmth of the room, their frank enjoyment of the food and wine, gave to Agnes an uplifted sense of well-being—the exaggerated and intense illusion of vitality which is snatched in happy hours only by the delicate.

Barriers that had seemed to rise inexorably between them now fell completely away. Their love required no halting interpreter in speech or gesture. It looked frankly out of their eyes and spoke straight out in commonplace endearments which, winged by their passion, seemed each a poem.

They sat long over their coffee, and it was late

when Rivers reminded her of the miles still to be covered. They pushed off into a streaming waterway of colour. The sun had set; but there were heavy clouds in the east, whose edges were brightly fired. The light fell on the water and was broken into polished fragments. It fell, too, on the moving leaves of the willows. Agnes thought suddenly of epipsychidion, of the white light of eternity stained and shivered by time. The river and the woods were masses of light spilled and broken. After a while a chill crept over the water and the light of the sky became precious as a fire which falls together and scatters suddenly a last alms. The heavy clouds were coming up fast. Agnes realised suddenly that the way was late and long. The wind was unfolding a dark blue curtain from the east which soon must blot out the light. Warm days in spring often have such an end as this.

"It's getting unpleasantly black over there," said Rivers at last.

He trailed the pole a moment, and surveyed Agnes at full length among the cushions. She looked very frail against the dark blue background of the travelling sky.

"We must cover you up," Rivers said suddenly.

He came forward, unrolled a rug and laid it over her. She thanked him with a faint return of their old reserve.

They noticed, in passing, a house-boat on the side of the river, for it was lighted and alive with a homely warmth and murmur which emphasised the forlornness of the darkening river. Agnes watched a star engulfed by the blue cloud—she seemed to have lost a friend. The noise of the water began to tell melancholy and cold stories. The face of Rivers was now indistinct and grey. A few large drops of rain had already fallen, and the air was threatening a mist.

"I'm sorry," said Rivers, breathing hard under the anxious, rapid thrust of the pole. "I ought to have seen this coming."

"How far is Twickenham?" asked Agnes.

"It's another two miles."

"That's all right," she assured him. "I'm as cosy as can be."

"Yes; but it's going to be worse, and there's no shelter to be had."

An idea occurred to Agnes. She sat up in the punt.

"If the worst happens, Bob, there's father's house-boat."

"Is there anybody there?" asked Rivers. The rain was now beginning to pelt. The trees came down to the river and made it dark.

"There will be nobody there," said Agnes. "I think we should see it from here. We hide the key under the mat and a woman visits it for cleaning once a week. It's called the *Leda*."

"What will your father say?" protested Rivers.

Nevertheless he made towards the right side of the river. The position, as he saw it, with the deep solicitude of a sturdy man for a woman whose fragility he exaggerated, was becoming serious. The thin rug was already heavy with rain, for a sudden storm had now caught them, ferociously lashing the water. Rivers was soaked to the skin. He drove the punt under the lee of a dark houseboat blurred with rain.

"This seems to be the fellow," he shouted. Agnes was cowering under the rug. Rivers jumped on board and found the key under a drenched and threadworn mat. He opened the door.

"Now," he said, coming to Agnes, "I'm going to carry you in rug and all."

He lifted her from the punt before she had time to realise that they were moored, and carried her into the boat.

For a moment they had time to be thoroughly wretched. Rivers was steaming with wet and extreme exercise. Agnes was thoroughly chilled.

"Idiot that I am," Rivers groaned; "you will catch your death of cold."

They could now look faintly about them. Agnes saw that Rivers's clothes were clinging to him, and dripping copiously. This roused her.

"It's perfectly all right now," she said; "here we are, and here we shall have to stay for the time being."

"But what are we going to do?"

"My father manages his house-boat as he manages everything else. We shall probably find all that we want."

She went to a cupboard and found some matches. Then they shut out the wind and lit the lamp. Rivers pounced at once on a well-laid fire. By the time he had persuaded this to be really warm Agnes reappeared from an inner room with a dressing-gown and some flannel trousers. She herself had already removed her wet skirt.

"Henry's," she said briefly, as she threw the trousers at Rivers.

Rivers made many difficulties, but was persuaded at last to change. It was only when he

went into the room where Agnes had left her things that he became acutely sensible of the pass to which the storm had brought them. He listened anxiously to the rain hammering the roof and thence to the empty dress upon the bed.

When he returned to the outer room he found that Agnes had produced coffee and condensed milk from the cupboard and was boiling a kettle on the fire.

"We shall be late home to-night," said Rivers, drawing up a large settee to the fire. "It's another mile to Twickenham."

"That's all right," said Agnes, stirring vigorously at the coffee. "It probably means that I shall have to settle with father before the wedding instead of after it."

"Would you like me to come along and support you?" asked Rivers.

"No, thank you," said Agnes. "I don't seem to mind father at all now. I seem suddenly to have grown out of all that."

She looked at Rivers with lit eyes, and Rivers saw the veins in her throat quiver.

"I don't mind anything to-night," she suddenly added. "It's just you and me."

There were many things—apart from the urgent,

breaking tone of this confession—to give to this moment a peculiar expressiveness. The rain and wind outside were at their worst, giving to their refuge a sense of shelter against all exterior things. The moan and rattle of the storm prompted in them a desire to be yet more familiar, to come yet closer as in a league against some raging enemy. Then, also, they stood within the shadow of their coming separation—a shadow which already lay across the mind of Agnes, starkly dividing this intimate present from an uncertain future. Her unconscious shivering against the chill of that advancing time prompted her to creep more closely into the comfort of the immediate hour.

They talked of indifferent things as they refreshed themselves and waited for the storm to pass. Agnes had hung her wet skirt by the fire, and sat loosely wrapped upon the hearthrug. Rivers, now feeling very homely and at ease, watched from the settee the light playing on her face. There was something so domestic in their situation that he could not fail to remember continually that to-morrow she would be his wife. The thought troubled, yet greatly sweetened, the cosiness of their adventure.

Suddenly Agnes turned from the fire, and looked over at him.

"I'm not sorry we're here," she said abruptly.

"The rain doesn't seem to be drying up," Rivers irrelevantly answered.

"There's plenty of time," protested Agnes.

"But——" Rivers hesitated.

"Aren't you anxious about getting home?" he ended, a little lamely.

Agnes seemed to be blotting something from her mind. She raised herself on her knees and leaned upon the settee beside him.

"Why should I be anxious?" she asked. "This is just what I wanted. I have got quite away."

She became urgent, almost vehement.

"Please, dear," she continued, "don't think of me as having any life at all apart from you. Everything else is outside."

Rivers was moved by her urgency; and the near prettiness of her disarray awoke in him a delight he could no longer deny. Her eyes and hair swam in a mist of blue and gold, and then suddenly he was kissing her. For a long while they stayed together, listening to the wind as it passed gradually to a lower and softer note.

It came to them as a shock that the thrumming

of the rain had ceased. Rivers gently left Agnes by the fire and went to one of the windows. The storm had passed, and a cold moon was racing between gaps of cloud. He came back and looked at Agnes.

"We can tidy ourselves now," he said, "and start for Twickenham."

She sat up on the settee.

"Anyone would think," she said, "that you were impatient to go."

"I am thinking of you."

"Think of yourself. That will please me better."

Rivers pulled at the rug which had covered Agnes in the punt. He was at heart as reluctant as Agnes to start off into the cold. His delight in her caused his hand to tremble as he folded the rug. He hardly dared to speak or to look lest he should betray how sensible he had become of her nearness.

The letters he had picked up at Richmond, and thrown as unimportant into the punt, tumbled on to the floor. Mechanically to cover his unrest he picked them up and put them on the table.

"Oughtn't you to read them," suggested Agnes.

The trace of irony in her voice hurt him. He

crossed towards her. Before he could speak she was entreating his forgiveness.

"It hurts me to find you so ready to end our time together. It seems as if it did not matter to you enough."

"Agnes dear," he stammered, holding her fast, "I cannot tell you how much it matters. Thank heaven I shall leave you, when the time comes, as my wife. At least we shall have had *that*."

They stood together for a moment. Then Agnes drew gently away, and began to put straight her hair, in front of the fire, at a mirror above the mantelpiece. She took her skirt from the fireplace, passed her hand over the damp fringe, and went into the inner room.

Rivers, left alone, again began to turn over his letters. He noticed now, among a number of circulars that one was briefed "On His Majesty's Service."

"I ought to have opened this before," was his faint thought in a consciousness vivid with Agnes.

Then he found himself trying to master the sense of something impertinent and absurd—something which hammered again and again upon his absent brain till at last it had stunned him to all but its own significance. Then he felt as if he were hold-

ing back from his mind, by virtue of a sheer refusal to accept it, a truth which threatened him.

He told himself to read again the words which frightened him, minutely and coolly. He obeyed, and saw there was no doubt at all. He was ordered to report himself at Folkestone in the morning for service in France. All further leave was stopped, and no possible exception could be made.

When Agnes came into the room Rivers had looked his disappointment in the face and mastered it.

She was pinning on her hat by the fireplace.

"Agnes," he began, but the constraint of his voice dismayed him, and he stopped. He could not find the words to continue.

She turned abruptly, almost hearing the news in the tone of his voice.

He handed her the order. Disappointment was frankly written upon his open face. Something stirred in her. She took the letter and realised the order in a flash.

No thought of self intruded into her immediate and instinctive action. In an instant she had taken him into her arms. The pretence that he did not care was simply swept aside. Without disguise she began to comfort him.

But at last he drew away.

"Well," he said, with a cheerful affectation that jarred horribly the quiet of the room. "The milk's properly spilled this time and no mistake. I shall have to come home on an early leave supposing——"

He suddenly left his sentence in the air, for Agnes was quietly looking at him. Almost she seemed to be smiling with the mockery of one who refused to take seriously the thing she heard.

"You do care very much," she said at last, irrelevantly. "Don't you, dear?"

She saw in his eyes how much he cared, and she remembered the phrase he had lately used: "*At least we shall have had that!*" By all the rules it was not now to be allowed them. She was required to send him away and perhaps they were not again to meet.

She came beside him. He leaned to her and took her by the arms.

"I was a fool to pretend," he said. "Of course I care. It hurts. I—I wanted you just now. It would have helped me out there." He kissed her; then he put her away.

She rose quietly from beside him and took the pins out of her hat.

He watched her a moment, then he became almost afraid.

"Why do you do that?" he began. "You don't mean——"

He hesitated and broke off helplessly.

Agnes extinguished the lamp and after a moment of darkness he was aware of her beside him in the firelight.

"I shall stay here to-night," she said.

XIV

THE CULTIVATION OF SELF

Two days after his encounter with Rivers and Monica in Mortimer Street Pelham was striding the platform at Paddington Station waiting for the Exeter train. He had had a letter that morning from a friend who lived in Devonshire and now urgently invited him to come down. He seized upon this invitation as his means of escape.

John's words had bitten home. Either he must put the war clean out of his thoughts, or yield. He could no longer resist by halves.

Here, however, a decisive test was offered. Willoughby Graham was a near friend of his college years. They had planned together their scheme of things. Equally they had agreed that the only salvation for a man was in singularity—in a resolute refusal to be herded. Graham had been prompted to discover an eclectic personality in his nobly endowed capacity to enjoy things. He had early begun to refine upon his pleasures till

they seemed to be leading him up to a revelation denied to the mere frequenter of the market and the synagogue. He made a great point of denying that the senses and the soul were disparate. He put aside religion, morality, and the merely prudent moderation of those who followed in all things the middle way. These were blind alleys for the sheep. He would adventure along his purely individual way as his fastidious ear and touch and taste urged him. He would forgo no pleasure that he needed for his self-discovery. He would omit no means of beautifully expressing his own character and will in the things he said and did and, above all, collected. He collected most things—pictures, books, music, furniture, flowers. He had also, as will shortly appear, collected Phrene.

He had a great deal in common with Pelham. They agreed that the sole duty of a man was to be himself. Graham took the way of taste whereas Pelham took the way of reason. But each found precisely the same pleasure in following his chosen path. A successful argument gave to Pelham precisely the satisfaction which Graham derived from an original Degas, a rare saxifrage, a seventeenth-century first edition, or an excellent dinner.

Pelham wondered, as he walked the platform at Paddington, why exactly he had been sent for. Was his friend in need of him? Had he, too, felt the challenge of events? Was he calling for assistance?

A phrase of his letter repeatedly recurred to Pelham. "Here at Sticklehampton," Graham had written, "I can promise you quite definitely you will hear nothing of the war. That gigantic impertinence I have excluded and shall continue to exclude." Pelham was too well read in his own sore battles with this "impertinence" not to detect in the over-protesting of his friend a signal of distress.

Yet his friend was well protected. When Pelham left the express at Exeter, and began a slow journey into the wilds of Devonshire, he was approaching a fortress where human wilfulness might well be expected to fight on even terms with whatever common purpose might come to shake it. For the first time since war broke out, and there had come this universal threat to blend all men indifferently in the discipline of a big, inexorable service, Pelham felt, as he receded farther and farther from the beaten ways of England, the possibility of shelter and peace. He looked from

the windows of the train upon vast spaces of moor with glimpses of wild tide and climbing forest. Before these deserted and stolid hills, the unbroken lines of the sea, and a shadowed sky which drew all eyes indefinitely from the earth, history seemed a broken and vague fretting of nations uneasy and astray.

"I hold by that sea and sky," thought Pelham, turning restlessly from the window. "It is better to discover for oneself some part of their secret than to stand in a regiment with all the heroes."

He argued with himself as the lonely stations flickered past. There had been wars before the present war, and they had all receded to a vague noise and tumult, lit with occasional deeds which lived by virtue of the beauty with which dead poets had invested them. If to-day, Pelham reflected, there happens to be some unknown poet who is quietly, away from the world, achieving some work to rank with the greatest, it is he who will mark this year for mankind more indelibly than the field armies. The present war oppresses us only because it is present, and because it very rudely disturbs a modern school of philosophers.

He landed late upon the wind-swept platform of Sticklehampton. Graham was waiting with a car.

They greeted briefly and started across the moors towards the sea with hardly a word between them. The wind in their ears made conversation difficult; but Graham stopped the car on the top of a rise which gave to them a superb outline of hill and sea, on which the relics of a sunset imprinted all degrees of violet and blue. They looked in silence for a while.

"Well," said Graham, as he started the car down into the dale, "I suppose that looked pretty much the same in the time of Alexander the Great."

Pelham looked at his friend. This echo of his late meditations in the train struck home.

"You too!" he briefly exclaimed.

They had an almost telepathic knowledge of one another. Graham understood the cryptic exclamation of his friend. Pelham noted in Graham faint but sure signs that the epicurean tenor of his existence had lately been ruffled.

Graham was of an athletic and sanguine temperament, who gave one an impression of singleness and unreserve. It was really his frankness—his inability to tolerate in himself any hesitation or periphrasis—which had made him an agnostic champion of taste. He lived frankly for health and pleasure and he required a philosophy which

would honestly allow him to open out quite naturally to the sun. Pelham had never before seen him in any way occluded. But this evening Graham had, in the act of enjoying a beautiful prospect, actually appeared to be troubled with side thoughts. This was unlike Graham; and Graham's eyes, with their unfamiliar reserve, were equally unlike. He appeared to have thoughts which he did not desire to confess.

Graham had built his house in one of the loveliest spots in England—a house he had largely designed for himself with a view to comfort and air and the framing of his possessions. Strange critics objected to its modernity—its innocence of English atmosphere and tradition. Too obviously it had not grown out of the soil on which it rested. It suggested Epicurus in exile. Though it went excellently with the hills and the sea, though the lines were simple, and the stone chosen to look well in an English light, it was clearly not an English house.

But Graham derided the critics. He defied anybody to build him a house which was more innocent of all unpleasant associations. There was not a stone of it which suggested he was living in a Christian country, and there was not a trace

of any one of the innumerable features commonly employed by modern architects to decorate the steel frames of Government and industrial offices.

Pelham, as he entered the house, was more conscious than usual of its exotic atmosphere. Leaving the sweep of the moor and sea, so generously offered to its western side, was like coming out of England into a place where all ages and nations met to celebrate a festival. Egypt and Greece, Italy of the Renaissance, and France of the Grand Monarch, were as near and familiar as Tudor England. To add further point to the indifferent hospitality of the house to all times and races, Phrene stood to welcome him on the stairs.

Phrene was a French Greek with a genius for sensation. She had for the past two years been the wife of Graham, a loyal partner in his search for the exquisite. They had lived a wandering life between England and Greece, where Graham had a villa not far from Athens.

Phrene was fair, with violet eyes and finely cut features. But her mouth and gesture corrected the aquiline severity of her face. In repose she gave one the impression of a temperament fatally serious. She had the grave intentness of a woman engrossed by the intensity and complexity of her

emotions. But when she was speaking, or actively interested in persons or things, the swift progress of her thought was physically legible.

Graham found in her the perfection of his ideal. His friends had smiled when he married her. One of them, a Frenchman, had said that by marrying Phrene he had robbed Europe of a woman who clearly was marked out to be a genius of the half world. Graham, who once had had this thought himself, promptly challenged his friend and broke his arm with a pistol.

He had married Phrene for many reasons. He desired that there should be nothing in the least limited in their companionship. He wanted her to be equally at home with him everywhere, and he wanted her entirely and for ever.

Therefore, though he knew well enough that she would have accepted any kind of alliance he might propose, he had nevertheless asked her to be his wife. Her gladness in accepting this proposal sprang solely from the present evidence it gave her of his complete need. Marriage, for her, was no more than a perfect liaison.

But marriage had profoundly modified her attitude. Graham had at first been for her no more than the means of her adventure. But

gradually this means had become an end. All her life of sensation and delight in people and things was now centred, past remedy, in an intense and inexhaustible communion with the man who had helped her to so much. Graham's motive in marrying Phrene was justified. All her genius was for him alone.

To-night, as she greeted Pelham, she had the appearance of a fire too roughly blown by the wind. Her flame lay prone, but ready to blaze, vertically, with an added light, when the wind should cease. Pelham saw in her at once the complement of the change he had already noted in his friend. Clearly this house now held, not only its treasures, but also its problem.

Pelham passed to his room and dressed for dinner. When he joined Phrene in the drawing-room he was oddly prompted to think of Diana. There could be no greater contrast than between the two women. Each of them was equally vital, but there was an entirely different quality in their vitality. They had met. They had disliked one another. To Diana there was something almost abandoned in the way Phrene enjoyed things. Her pleasure was too physical and too emphatic.

Diana, on the other hand, had all that high

reserve which regards with suspicion anything in the nature of excess or ingenuity in passion. Phrene might almost be described as flaunting her womanhood and this had offended Diana.

Pelham recalled this curiously instinctive antagonism of Diana and Phrene as he saw his hostess to-night standing alone, dressed with that sure belief in her beauty which was part of her charm. The antagonism seemed to him symbolic of something wider than a want of personal sympathy. Phrene was so obviously out of all relation to the life he had left behind him in London. She stood for that individualism, that personal and anarchic cultivation of self, to which he himself was clinging, and for which Diana had shown him her hostility and contempt. Pelham assumed that in Phrene, at any rate, he had found a sincere disciple of his creed. She would have no understanding, Pelham assumed, of the altruist passion which, as he already had perceived, was pulling at the heart of Graham.

Pelham realised that Phrene was speaking.

"It's good of you to visit us," she said.

"Not at all," said Pelham, coming abruptly out of his thoughts. "This place is too heavenly.

Willoughby stopped the car on the top of the moor to enjoy the sea."

"And did he really enjoy it?" she asked.

Pelham looked at her sharply, and she added:

"You wonder at my question?"

"A little," answered Pelham. "Willoughby, I always imagine, enjoys everything."

There was a silence and Phrene smiled. Her smile was a riddle. She also shrugged a little; but under the shrug Pelham thought he detected that her nerves were twisted.

"Willoughby doesn't enjoy things as he used to do," she said.

The thought came uninvited to Pelham that if Graham could not find his anodyne in Phrene he could hardly hope to find it elsewhere. The stretch of her nerves caused her to convey more than usual an impression of responsive sensibility, of a capacity for pleasure, stored and quintessential. Quick as light she read in his eyes the homage he paid to her. She flung out her hands with the gesture of one holding herself out to be prized:

"He ought to be satisfied, don't you think?"

Pelham's "By Jove, I should think so!" was stifled by his sense of an anti-climax in this British heartiness. He silently bent his head.

Graham joined them, and they went in to dinner. Pelham remarked that he seemed to be the only guest.

"I've never known it happen here before," he said.

"We've been alone for months," Graham lightly explained. "We had a full house in July last. Then they vanished."

"You have been here alone since July?" asked Pelham.

"As you see," said Phrene.

"You're a wise and happy pair," said Pelham. "But you might have thought sooner of me. London is not a comfortable place just now. It is mainly a case of saying good-bye and being left behind."

"You have stood it pretty well," said Graham, looking at his friend.

"Why not?" asked Pelham, with an affected carelessness.

"Well, it's rather annoying suddenly to find that all your friends have rather different tastes than you imagined," answered Graham.

"To me," he continued, "it has come as a shock that most of my companions cannot resist the thrill of putting themselves in peril of sudden

death. I exhausted that very crude sensation years ago."

Graham was referring to his adventures as a Greek interpreter in the Balkan campaign of 1912. Pelham painfully recognised in his tone just that need for self-justification with which he had himself so sorely wrestled. He sat silent, feeling as though he were the audience of his own individual comedy played by another.

"The fact is," Graham persisted, while Phrene watched him with a melancholy care, "most fellows have a wrong idea of war. Modern war is exciting for a week, and then it is the most tedious thing in the world—tedious and dirty. It's a thing to keep out of till you are absolutely needed. It's like paying income tax. People don't offer to pay income tax till they are asked to do so by law. They don't do it for fun."

"Fun?" echoed Pelham, filling in the painful silence which naturally follows a monologue.

"Of course," Graham pursued, "I'm not much of a politician, but I take it that if there were any real necessity for anyone but the eager amateurs of war to come forward, they would make it a law. But I understand that military service in this

country is voluntary. The men who go now are going because they like it."

Pelham in his mind's ear heard the hollow reverberation of a mental fist beating upon a door wilfully barred. He had himself used almost these identical words. He turned to Phrene in his distress, almost rudely ignoring his friend.

"You know, Phrene," he said, "this is a breach of faith. Willoughby said in his letter I should hear nothing at all of the war."

"We are not talking of the war. We are talking of our friends," protested Graham.

"The distinction is too fine for us," laughed Phrene.

Thereafter an exaggerated lightness of heart was their sole tribute to the cloud that hung between them. Graham talked with a painfully emphatic enthusiasm of some treasures lately added to the house—a cabinet by Shearer, a first edition of Congreve, some drawings of Augustus John.

After dinner they amused themselves with modern music and the higher criticism. Not a word was said to suggest that any stone had lately stirred the surface of the water, and now lay, known to them all, at the bottom of the pool.

When, however, Phrene said good-night to Pelham on the stairs she said to him:

"I thought it would be good for Willoughby to have you with him here. But now I am not so sure."

Then, without another word, she left him.

An hour later Pelham, looking from the window of his room over a sea splendidly lit with a moon absurdly round, saw Graham come out upon the terrace beneath him. For half-an-hour Graham was striding restlessly about, stopping at intervals to fill himself with the shining peace.

Then Phrene came to meet him, warmly wrapped. Graham turned to her and held out his hands. They looked closely at one another for a moment, and then Graham with a gesture as of one who threw every doubt away pressed Phrene towards him. She seemed a moment to resist. But as Pelham looked away she was passionately reconciled. The two figures stayed awhile looking to the sea, then passed beneath him slowly into the house.

XV

DEPARTED

MOONLIGHT and water that same night had suspended the soul of Agnes in a region where all material things were lost. Moonlight crossed the tiny room of the boat, where she watched, in solid bars; and water played in shadow upon the walls. The chuckle of the river alone broke a quiet, curiously light, as of a world not so much oppressed as relieved by its silence.

She rested, exquisitely awake to the beauty of her remoteness from the world, poised in a free space between the passion of her marriage and the farewell which had yet to be spoken.

She stirred a little, and held her watch to the light. It was still an hour or more to the dawn.

The sun was breaking through the mist as, hours later, she remained at the window of the boat looking towards the reach of water where Rivers had disappeared in the grey of the morning. Never had she felt more utterly at peace, more

assured of the inevitable rightness of things done. She even told herself that she was glad of the accident that had put her beyond the law.

Her thoughts floated as idly as the water, catching happily at remembered words and moments, governed by a deep physical rest. She had not yet begun to think of her shattered arrangements for breaking with her home life in FitzJohn's Avenue.

But her dreaming had soon to be broken. She turned reluctantly from the lit water, and began mechanically to get herself ready to leave the boat. Rivers had arranged with her to send a messenger to the wedding-party. She herself decided to collect her personal property from FitzJohn's Avenue and move into the care of Mrs. Baines. Mrs. Baines would have to be told about the frustrated wedding, and of Rivers's intention to get leave as soon as he reasonably could. Happily there was no need to explain at any length. Mrs. Baines would assume that Agnes had spent the night at home. Agnes, though she had not the least desire to be mysterious, did not feel called upon to publish her conduct.

She made herself as presentable as she could in her spoiled dress, and put in order the tiny rooms

of the boat. Then she looked her farewell at the place which now possessed her most intimate memories and opened the door. The sun warmed her generously as she stood upon the little bridge and she found it hard to go. At last, however, she turned towards the land.

She was annoyed to see that a man was walking towards her across the field path which led down to the river. She realised how conspicuous she was; and, as she did not want to attract notice or curiosity, she drew back into the boat awhile to allow the man to pass.

His progress was slow and tedious, and she turned to her window again and sank deeply into her thoughts. She lived again through the farewell of the morning, when she had seen in Rivers a deep anxiety. She had set herself to drive that anxiety away, and she had amazed herself by an impetuous and frank eloquence in which she had gloried in their escapade.

"What did he fear?" she had asked. He would surely return; and if he did not (he had felt her shudder at the words) she would have a memory of which nothing could bereave her.

She had intoxicated him afresh with her certainty. He had shared with her again, as she

had spoken, levels of emotion too far above the world's routine to be affected by any further disquiet. He had gone away, at peace and happy, but resolute to worry immediately for the necessary leave as soon as he had obeyed his orders to report himself.

She had not at that moment thought of his return, lost in the contemplation of his vanishing figure, giant-like in the mist.

Even now, as she thought of this exalted parting she recovered that feeling of being above and beyond the world. Desolation was lurking for her, but she still could keep the expanding emptiness away with memories invoked and held.

She held them now, and breathed rapidly of the clean morning air.

Then, suddenly, she heard steps on the bridge from the river bank to the boat. The intruding noise called her back to the present. The man she had seen seemed actually to be coming to find her.

She moved angrily towards the door, and made ready to warn him away. Then the door was flung wide open, and there was a simultaneous call of astonishment from Agnes and from the man who entered.

It was her brother Henry.



XVI

A CLASH OF OPINIONS

It is not pleasant for a young man, naturally fastidious, who has had the habit of regarding himself as something rather finer than the average, and has instinctively saved his self-respect in difficult places by an ingenious blindness to the truth, suddenly to find himself involved in an accumulating disgrace. At the first hint of trouble in his father's works fear had shot into Henry. He felt a shaking in the foundations of his life—a peril which threatened not merely his present honour but a cruel unveiling of his past. He had lived in a shallow acquiescence with things indefensible.

He had accepted his father's economic creed out of an ignoble laziness. He had never really tested it or referred it to a cool and painful judgment. He liked the things which wealth commanded, and he easily assumed that the wealth he shared with his father was the reasonable wages of captaincy in an industrial war with lower forms of intelli-

gence. He despised, as well he might, the men who, claiming to stand for the power and honour of labour, haggled with his father for extra pennies and fewer hours. It was right that organised labour, with its deliberate encouragement of bad work and its sordid politics, should be resisted with a firm hand. He was content to be his father's ally because he bitterly disliked his father's enemies. Further he had never troubled to look. Nevertheless he sometimes allowed himself to hope for a day when he would be quit of commerce with its offensive contacts and disputes.

Then the war had arrived, and thrust misgivings thickly upon him. His father's steadily cynical pursuit of his interests as an employer opened up avenues of reflection, blocked perpetually with abrupt, unanswered questions. He began very clearly to see, as a new party to the strife between his father and his father's men, a third and even more interested party, which hitherto had been not in the least considered. He began, in fact, to realise that the country itself was a party.

It was at this point that Henry, confronted with the evil and harsh results of the creed he had accepted; thrust face to face and held, day by day, in a thicket of intrigue; seeing his father's men

bitter with suspicion that their patriotism was enriching their natural enemy—seeing these men clinging to the rules of a feud which forbade them any pride of craft; counting their minutes and weighing out their strength; ready rather to disown their English brotherhood than yield to their capitalist master; distrustful of any appeal to their consciences as a device of the profiteer; their sense of country dulled and thwarted by their sense of class—it was at this point that Henry began to look back into the past and to ask himself squarely, and with a growing shame, as to how and why all pride and honour had gone out of the industrial life of England.

His questions had bulked and multiplied as the weeks went by; and, when the climax came, and his father's men were preparing to push their quarrel to extremes, he could no longer avoid an answer.

Henry's father had already observed his disquiet, and had masterfully insisted that Henry should meet the men himself. He calculated, as often before, upon his son's disgust with the men's narrow and obstinate leaders. He did not realise that his son was looking beyond accidents of the moment to an old sowing.

The dispute at his father's works came to a head in the week of Redway's visit to FitzJohn's Avenue. Henry spent a distressful day at the works—a day which sent him for counsel, not to his father's house, but to his flat in Bloomsbury. He had realised in dealing with the men that he could no longer repeat to them any of the old formulæ. He realised, in fact, that his chief anxiety was, not to beat the men, but at all costs to avoid a breach with them. Before meeting his father, who would bitterly denounce his conduct of the negotiations, he wanted time to reflect.

He had appealed to the men's leaders to work on behalf of their comrades in France and Flanders. They had answered bitterly that they were working, not for their comrades, but for an employer who had reduced their wages whenever they had increased their output. He had pointed out that their organised restrictions upon labour were directly helping the enemy. They had pointed out that without these restrictions they were helpless to resist exploitation. They clearly regarded his appeal to them as an attempt to use the public need for the advantage of the firm. Their patriotism, it seemed, was to be used, not to defeat the

enemy, but to increase the dividends of Messrs. Smith. The bitterness of their suspicion, the inveterate and reflex character of their hostility, their regarding of the dispute as a matter which concerned only themselves and their master, at first disgusted and amazed Henry. But he was shortly asking how these feelings had arisen. Were they not entirely natural? Was he not himself *for the first time in his life* talking of the public need?

There was the point. The idea was new. Men who had grown old in contests from which that idea of the State had been systematically excluded could not be expected to change their habits in a moment. It was essential to inquire into the origin of their selfishness. Who had first invented and practised a system in which citizenship and pride of work could hardly count at all?

These were the questions which drove Henry up and down his elegant room in Bloomsbury, starting in him trains of thought which led him by different ways to the same end.

He took his hat and coat and went down into the street. He was feverish with his task. He was going to his father as an enemy.

He arrived at FitzJohn's Avenue in time for

dinner. His father had received a report of the day's proceedings and was waiting to challenge him. Hardly a word was spoken at dinner. The empty chair of Agnes seemed to deepen the silence between father and son.

Mrs. Smith was dismissed from the table almost before she had finished her dessert, and they waited intently for the servants to go.

When the door was finally closed upon them Mr. Smith quickly went to a bureau in the corner and drew from it a typewritten document. He came back to the table. Father and son looked at one another for a moment. It was question and answer between them. At last the old man looked away. He knew the expression in Henry's eyes too well. He had seen it in all his children.

"Well, Harry," he said in hard, brittle tones, "I see it's come at last. You're going to follow the rest of my dutiful family. You'll make it a dead heat with Agnes."

"Agnes?" said Henry, startled out of his own affair.

"I said Agnes," rapped his father.

"What has happened to Agnes?"

"She is getting married. At least I hope it's no worse than that. If you hadn't been quite so

deeply occupied with yourself you might have seen the state she's been getting into."

"Bob Rivers!" exclaimed Henry in sudden enlightenment.

"That is really clever of you," said his father.

"But we'll come to the point."

He hit the papers on the table.

"Am I to understand that you've been giving the firm away to a lot of whining rascals?"

Henry was silent. His father waited in cold anger.

"I've been thinking," said Henry at last.

"And this, I suppose"—Mr. Smith tapped the papers—"is the result? I'll trouble you in future not to do your thinking at my expense."

"What are you going to do?" said Henry.

Now that the issue was clear between them he was curiously calm.

"I have already countermanded your concessions to the men."

"Very well. I resign my partnership."

This was more than Mr. Smith expected. He looked round the deserted room, whose chairs the years had emptied and left vacant beside the wall. He was suddenly brought very near to misgiving. He rose and walked up and down the room for a

moment, fighting with his temper. At last he came to Henry.

"Listen to me, my boy," he said, sitting to the table. "We're not going to waste words one way or the other. I'll just be frank. I don't want to lose you. We've been good partners, and I thought we were going to run together to the end. What's all this about. What's come to you, Harry? You used to be as firm as I was in standing up to these blackguards. Are you going to give way now and let them kill the business?"

"Are you thinking of the business, father, or of the profits?"

"I don't propose to run the business as a bankrupt."

"We've got to run the business on any terms. Our clear duty is to keep it running. To do that we've got to remove from the men all ground for suspecting that we ourselves are going to benefit by their work."

"Then you propose to yield them everything they ask?"

"I propose to face the facts. So long as our men believe they are working for us they will continue to work under a discipline which forbids

them to work their best at any time, and prompts them to stop work altogether on the least provocation. It's useless going behind this state of things and asking who's to blame. There it is—the men won't work for us. We've got to prove to them that they are not working for us at all, but for the country."

"The men don't care a tuppenny curse for the country. They're working for themselves."

"Then we've got to set them an example. We've got to show them that we care nothing at all for ourselves, that we care only to deliver our stuff to the Government. Personally, I should like to see all our war profits confiscated to pay for the war."

There was a short silence. Each of them knew that argument would only widen the rift between them. Henry waited for a formal repetition of his father's belief in the remorseless laws of industry.

But Mr. Smith abruptly rose from his chair.

"Then you are leaving me, Harry?" he briefly asked.

Henry looked at his father, hoping to see some sign that he was accessible. He was appalled by the set resolve of the mouth and eyes confronting

him. He saw that neither reason nor affection could effect a breach in his father's will.

The question in Henry's eyes was answered outright by his father.

"I have lived by my own light for sixty years," he said. "I'm not to be changed in an hour. I shall meet my men to-morrow, and offer them what is strictly their due. If they put down their tools it's their own affair. I'm not responsible for what they do."

An hour later Mr. Smith sat alone in his work-room, dealing with the facts and figures of the case in dispute between himself and his men. He heard a slamming of the door, and saw his son going down the steps of the house.

Agnes at that moment was lying beside Rivers in the boat at Twickenham. Her father knew only that she had not as yet come home. But he did not now expect that she would. This was a trifle beside the defection of Henry, his favourite son.

He watched Henry go down the steps, and the figures before him faltered a little.

Then, quickly, he shut his lips firmly together, and returned to the papers in front of him.

XVII

THE MEETING OF TWO REBELS

THE following morning Henry had to start his life afresh, and he felt the need of a place, remote and quiet, to put his thoughts in order. The boat at Twickenham was often his private haunt. He drove out of town and walked across the fields to the river.

He was thinking as he went of the tangle of affairs to be settled before he could get free of the past—wondering, too, whether he ought not to retain as closely as possible an interest in his father's business. Conditions, he foresaw, would change. He remembered the warnings of Redway. Possibly his father, finding himself at a later stage entirely out of touch, would, under pressure, retire. His father would never consent to work under public control. Henry and his father could not work together, but the time was coming, Henry saw clearly now, when his father would not be able to work at all. Was it

not his duty to hold himself in reserve against that time?

He would dearly have liked to be clear of all contact with the business. His fresh, raw insight into its quality, left him sensitively eager to escape. The thought of meeting again the men who yesterday had thrust before him the corruption of their citizenship, and forced him to admit that he and his father shared it, and were in the last resort responsible, filled him with disgust. Henry dreaded all unseemly things. His first impulse was to round off his old life and start afresh.

He wanted to apply for a commission. This would make his rebellion complete and spectacular. But in his awakened honesty he realised that this would be bravado in a man whose business experience must sooner or later be helpful. In the coming changes Henry could hardly avoid having an important share.

By the time he reached the river Henry had come to clear terms with himself. For him the coming months would hold no pretty or romantic secrets. He was richly paid for the idle and dashing pretences whereby he had hitherto disguised the essential vulgarity of his life.

It was at this point that he came face to face with Agnes.

There had been no deep confidence or affection between them; but Henry's first thought, when he saw her there, was that now they were closely allied, and that this meeting was somehow expressive of their alliance. Each of them had come out of the old life into something remote and new. They met in a secluded emancipation of their own.

They exclaimed at meeting. Their rebellion needed no explaining, but each was curious as to the precise way in which it had been declared.

Agnes, instinctively protecting her own secret, feverishly inquired of Henry:

"Why have you come to the *Leda*?"

"It's something to do," Henry answered, his eyes searching about the room for evidence of his sister's purpose there.

"But your work?" Agnes persisted.

"I have no work," said Henry.

"You have left the firm?"

"I can't come to terms with father."

"What are you going to do?"

Her questions came without pause. She wanted to put off the moment when Henry's silence would wait for her.

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"As yet," said Henry, "I don't know what I shall do. I think I shall wait till father retires from the business."

"He's fond of you," said Agnes. Her quick mind saw her father entirely in the cold and struck where alone he was vulnerable.

Henry thrust her sentiment aside.

"He's less fond of me," he said in tones as cutting as any his father could use, "than of his own wicked way. In me he saw his tool and inheritor, one who would continue to carry out his ideas. He finds now that I'm a human being, like his other children. He only tolerated any of us when we never opposed him. We were a sort of fringe."

Henry spoke thus bitterly to quench a disposition to think sadly of his father's house, emptied of its children, and of a bitter old man persisting in courses that were doomed.

He retorted upon his sister.

"If you really feel sorry for father you had better go and comfort him. He was talking about you last night. He notices everything."

"I was to be married to-day."

The words dropped from Agnes before she had thought to begin just in that way. Instinctively

her mind had seized on the fact which conventionally went some way towards her justification. She was not ashamed; but somehow it was by no means easy to say to one whom she had always associated with morning dress and a respectable firm of hardware manufacturers how she had spent the last few hours.

Henry was now aware that something was amiss.

"You were to be married," he repeated. "Has anything happened to prevent it?"

"Yes," said Agnes; "Bob had suddenly to report himself."

There was a needless defiance in her manner. Henry wondered at her excitement.

"Couldn't you arrange things in time?" he asked.

"We opened the letter—here—late last night."

"I see," said Henry after a pause.

There was a further silence. Agnes waited. He understood what had happened; and he was amazed to realise how little his sister's breach of the code mattered to him. Some fierce reagent was at work upon the social fabric. Habits were broken up. Men and women were acting in unaccountable ways.

"Well, Henry," said Agnes at last, "what have you got to say to me?"

He was surprised by her challenge. He felt that he had lost heavily by his late exclusion from her confidence. He crossed to her impulsively:

"We ought to be better friends," he said. "We must think of ourselves as together now—if you can."

They confirmed the alliance in a warm pressure of the hand.

"I think," said Henry with a sudden delicacy, "you will want to be alone. Suppose I go back to the station?"

"No, Harry," said Agnes, snapping the tension between them, "I'm starting off to arrange my affairs in town."

Henry saw his sister dwindling up the field towards the village. Her news had given to the reins of his formal existence a more romantic appearance. His private catastrophe was only part of a general process of destruction and renewal amid which those who obeyed the call to live bravely would find their part and place. He could not definitely explain his new content. Agnes had somehow justified him. She had seemed for a moment to knit up his own rebellion with the general crisis.

XVIII

A DUTY HARD TO PERFORM

As the spring wore slowly into early summer Kenneth John steadily sank into a deeper depression. The one thing which kept him loyal to his task was the increasing evidence of its need. All that Redway had feared regarding the impossibility of claiming services piecemeal from the country was being fulfilled. Many of the worst features of English life before the war still rankly flourished. The trade unions were stinting their labour; the whole of the mining industry was upon the edge of a general strike; many classes of employers and work-people alike were earning more money than ever they had earned before, and spending it lavishly.

But though the need was clear, and though the remedy to John was obvious, he could not keep down that sense of being parasitic and ineffectual which is the burden of all writers in an active time. It was difficult, in spite of Redway's encourage-

ment, to believe that his work could have the slightest effect.

There were times when he asked his friends not to write to him from Flanders. The contrast between his own work and theirs was too severe.

Nevertheless he clung to an honest conviction that his post of service lay in London. Unhappily he discovered that one may possess a conviction without being in the least resigned to it.

He was ruminating this bitter truth upon an evening in May as he sat in a taxi-cab jammed in the traffic at the bottom of Regent Street. He was on his way to a men's party at Redway's house in Portland Place.

London had never looked so lovely as in the early summer twilight of 1915. There is no city which better responds to a discreet and reasonable lighting. To-night her irregular buildings, toned by years of dust and rain and fog, went up into the steely blue air as though they had grown naturally out of the glimmering pavements. Miracles of light and atmosphere were wrought in the middle air, where the sparse yellow lamps and windows of the streets and buildings came to terms with the remnants of a sunset.

John rejoiced in the old and irregular genius of the city as it presented itself thus transfigured. But he soon lost his pleasure in a bitter reflection that at the earliest possible moment advertisement and the common needs of a metropolis would restore the flaring illumination of peace. He turned from it to observe the people crowding to the theatres in motor cars unusually new. These were the newest rich people, to whom the war had given in a few months what normally would have taken them years to secure. John hardly needed an evening poster, referring to the coming strike of the miners, to remind him of an obverse side to all this agreeable prosperity. The doctrine of private spoils still held the field.

At dinner that night Redway kept the conversation steadily upon the changes which had begun in England and would, he held, remain after the war was finished. John, partly in honest doubt and partly to disburden himself of his unhappy mood, was dismal and incredulous.

"I don't believe the country will be one jot better for the war," he flung out.

Furiously set upon, he challenged his critics.

"Tell me how this miracle is going to happen. Shall we be better socially?"

"Certainly," said Redway. "We shall get new blood into London through the New Armies, and we shall drop the Theosophists, Vorticists, and the democratic pushers. Also we shall have to spend our money with more discretion."

"What are you going to do with the people who buy their way in with war profits?"

"Snub them."

"I don't think so. You won't be able to afford it."

"Our politics will be better," said Redway.

"On the contrary," objected John. "The war is fast proving to the country that in the face of a democracy really on the make an over-civilised Government is powerless."

"Well," laughed Redway—he could laugh because he knew that John was not expressing his opinions, but unloading his cares—"you will at any rate admit that art and literature will be better. You were always an unbeliever in this new and clever century; and you will now be rejoicing in your great romantic revival in favour of simple things."

"There will be no art and literature," said John. "All the best men will be busy in other ways. The new fashion will be to affect a hearty barbarism."

Things like Futurism and the novel of detail have been knocked out; and for that I cannot profess to be sorry. But we shall get nothing in its place. We shall read detective stories and visit the *revues*."

"Of course you don't believe a word of all this," said Redway. "Just throw back your mind to our last delightful evening here before the war. Meantime I'll talk to Baddeley."

John returned to his fish, which was sauced for him with memories of many such evenings as that to which Redway particularly referred. Redway had been a collector of social types; and John had only to think for a few minutes to realise how completely all that once had excited this particular table had vanished.

He looked round this evening upon the few men Redway had been able to get together. They had all played a lively part in the restless social period into which Redway had introduced him as a young and interested spectator hardly three years ago. Many forgotten interests crowded upon him as he admitted to his consciousness pallid memories of that vanished time. John could hardly believe that, sitting beneath these candlesticks, he had had heady discussions with many of these men—that grave man, opposite him, in khaki, for instance,

who was now talking so earnestly on the propulsive qualities of cotton—on all kinds of topics which had never once been mentioned since the war broke out. His mind went back to a time when London was a magnet for all the charlatans in art, religion and philosophy, as well as a city which commanded, for cash down, the pick of the world's genius. Often in that room they had misused the riches of a dozen empires—enjoying with an equally frivolous zest the mighty with the trivial—entertaining themselves as heartily with exuberant theorists, eager to explain some new secret which was to reform the arts and transcend all that had hitherto been achieved, as with the divine products of genius itself. All was admitted—even the truly great—so long as it ministered to the general need for colour and sensation.

It was clever of Redway to evoke these memories; for they justified his frank incredulity as to John's professions of hopelessness. Whatever the future held, it would be something less indiscriminate and irresponsible than the past. Seen against a background of evenings when wit was rampant and logic was unchained, and the whole world was devoured to make one paradox, the present gathering took upon itself an unwonted austerity and

depth. This low-lit room, shut off from a city perplexed and darkened, solemn with the voices of men in sober discussion, promised to the future an assured and temperate health.

There must needs be a deepening of the current. Less effervescence there would undoubtedly be, and less apparent opulence and diversity. But only the trash would be blown away.

It was Baddeley's voice which first broke into these reflections. His voice suggested to John that some things at any rate remained firm amid the general mobility. Baddeley was a Balliol man and, like most Balliol men, he was at the Foreign Office.

But Baddeley's voice, as John's reflections gradually made room for external things, began to be attached to some information which he was imparting to Redway.

"And so," Baddeley was saying, "I have crossed the Rubicon."

John leaned forward and looked across Redway to his friend. Baddeley was the last man in the world to cross the Rubicon. To-night he looked unusually comfortable. He glistened with prosperity and had that comfortable air of premature middle age which only comes to well-paid and

uxorious young men who have passed too many examinations.

"What is this, Badders?" John smilingly asked him. "Are you going to buy a new house or something?"

"No," said Baddeley shortly. "I've enlisted."

"Not only enlisted," chuckled Redway, "but enlisted in defiance of the Government."

"Then he ought to be ashamed of himself," said John, covering an appreciable sinking of the heart with a fine show of indignation. "A fellow oughtn't to show off at Baddeley's time of life."

"That's just the point," said Baddeley. "I was beginning to realise that my youth was slipping away. It was now or never for me to assert that I am not yet thirty-two. Another six months and my whole life would have been a foregone conclusion."

"I see," said John tartly. "This is equivalent to dying your moustache. Why not grow old decently."

"It isn't decent for any man to grow old at thirty-two," retorted Baddeley.

Baddeley's retort was weighted with a gravity whose origin John appreciated well enough. Baddeley, indeed, had lately become a byword

among the men of his own generation. They regarded him as definitely surrendered to the pleasures of a good table and a complaisant helpmeet. He was growing fat. His philosophy and temperament were fast developing into a comprehensive purr. He had showed himself in public as foolishly and all too palpably satisfied with his house and his goods and his wife. Baddeley had been by common consent regarded as a finished man—ruined by a safe post and a pretty woman.

Baddeley was right. This sort of thing had not been decent.

John made amends to Baddeley by showing a handsome interest in his plans. Baddeley had gone into the Public Schools Battalion as a private. It suited his purpose well to become a private. Fatigue duty as a private would serve admirably to medicine his self-indulgence. In Baddeley's house there were always hot towels in the bathroom; and in his bedroom at home Baddeley had an electric heating apparatus which he could turn on before he ventured from under the eider-down.

The expression in John's face when Baddeley had explosively introduced himself as an enlisted soldier had not been lost on Redway. Redway

went with John into the hall when the time came for him to go.

"John," he said, closing the door behind him, "you must have a holiday."

"It can't be done," John answered promptly.

"On the contrary," said Redway, "if it isn't done you will be playing on me the trick which Baddeley has played on the Foreign Office. It would be rather difficult to bring off in your case, but I have heard of people learning the sight card by heart. Besides, you have too many friends in the War Office to make it at all safe for me to take any risks. So I'm going to send you to France."

"To France?"

"For a holiday. France is the best tonic I can think of for your particular complaint. Men who have been in France don't think of the war as a specific against old age. It's making too many of them prematurely grey."

"But——"

"The thing's settled. I can't have your face going down like a thermometer every time one of your friends goes into the army. In France, young man, you'll come to terms with your duty. We'll see about your papers to-morrow."

XIX

MISGIVINGS DISPELLED

DURING the three days of his preparations for France John exhibited towards Redway an increasing doubtfulness.

"You may judge," he said, "of the effect my journey is likely to have on me by what you see of me now."

"Not at all," said Redway.

"I don't quite follow your train of thought," persisted John. "You are sending me where I shall come up against the active work of the war as a sort of tourist. Could anything be more certain to increase my misery?"

"Nothing could be more certain to increase your misery," Redway cryptically echoed.

"Already," John continued, "my spirits have descended several degrees. I sat in the French Consulate for two hours this morning waiting for my *visé*. I had no business to be there at all, and I knew it."

"Excellent," said Redway.

"Do you think I'm likely to feel less intrusive in the military zone?"

"I think you will come back to me a wiser and a better man," said Redway.

John thought a minute, and then, flushing, he looked Redway in the face.

"At any rate tell me this. I shall see plenty of hardship out there. You're not intending to frighten me."

But Redway continued to smile.

John to the last remained indifferent and a little perplexed as to his expedition. He sailed upon a heavenly day from Folkestone bound for Dieppe and Paris. It was planned that he should stay awhile in Paris, and attempt to form some opinion as to the mood of civilian France. Then he would proceed into the country behind the lines with safe conducts from the Invalides. Finally he would use his military pass.

The resources of the ordinary traveller, duly supplemented with visits to the *Intelligence Anglaise* and the *commissaire* of police carried John to the edge of the fighting area. But before he had reached Senlis, or heard the guns, the miracle was accomplished. It began in Paris,

and it was completed on the battlefields of the Marne.

For three weeks he sunned himself in the serenity of Paris. Each day he felt himself more and more remote from the heart-searching and perplexity which at that time distracted the English public. In Paris he came into touch with a people which had made definite terms with the war. Every man he met had a fixed duty and position. In place of the interrogation, public and private, which in England was pressing continually upon the country's nerves, John found in Paris an atmosphere of settlement, and a hopefulness grounded on the dependable war sense of a nation for whom defeating the enemy was its business and daily bread.

He talked with men who were in touch with the national factories—men who stared at him when he asked whether the Government anticipated any difficulties with labour.

"There really is no such thing as labour," was the invariable tenor of their reply. "There are only soldiers."

Some of these men confirmed Redway's opinion that national service was needed rather to temper the spirit and to secure the discipline of nations at

war than to raise their armies. It was equivalent to the old Roman proclamation: *Ne quid res publica detrimenti capiat*. No such proclamation had issued from the leaders of Great Britain. Advertisements to catch a hero were no real evidence of the country's need. Service was still regarded as a proof of exceptional merit.

John was better able to appreciate the bearing of this when he came into touch with the armies of France and noted the way in which they were regarded by the people. Neither in the Press nor in the public of Paris was there any worship of the *poilu*. The *poilu* was treated as an ordinary citizen, called up to perform duties necessary to the existence of France. He was regarded as being about exactly the same business as the men in the factories and upon the land.

Some poignant illustrations of the way in which the people of France had come to regard the war as part of their lives—as a thing to be accepted without exclamation—were offered to John in the course of a long afternoon spent in the great military hospital of Val de Grace. He talked with men, mutilated and broken in health, who clearly expected nothing better than the bleak reward of a skilful surgery. Men who were decorated regarded

their honours simply as compensation for services rendered, and in many pitiful cases as granted in definite exchange for the loss of a limb or faculty. "*Pour mon œil*" was all that John could extract from a man who was wearing the *médaille militaire*. He would never forget that man, seated in a bare room, in his soiled and torn uniform, uncomforted and uncherished. He remembered, for contrast, the return of an English hero to his native town—the whole English Press in attendance and a recruiting officer hard at work in the crowd.

Paris was tranquil, because here the war was regarded as a public service. No man was craven or a hero; but simply a patriot under orders. There were no problems and no controversy. There was a national enterprise which was regarded by all alike as a sober, practical business belonging to everyone alike.

To come from the political and industrial rumour of London into an atmosphere such as this was to lose all sense of the war as an opportunity for personal gallantry or distinction. John realised how discreditable was his English malady. It had risen out of a snubbed vanity, which resented being kept out of something historical and fine. He was shamed by the spirit he found in

France. Had he been inspired by that same spirit himself, he would have unregretfully accepted the work he was best fitted to do—work, whose value—now that he was well away from it—he could quite impartially measure.

John had loved Paris from the moment when, as a mere week-ending Englishman, he had first set foot in it. He had never made the vulgar mistake of looking for Paris in Montmartre. He had seen Paris from the first as frugal, austere, intellectually hard and direct, wisely critical in her laughter, aiming in her higher types at a balanced employment of all the faculties. He thought of Paris as a city which bred excellent men of the world. Paris was the only city he knew which could follow the doctrines of Epicurus without degrading them.

John, in fact, had ruled out of his idea of Paris all that makes Paris most dear to the cosmopolitan rout who loudly possess her in time of peace; so that he was less astonished to find her now a true city of the soul.

One of his kindest friends in Paris was a Frenchman who, as the prefect of a French town now submerged under the German occupation, had seen some of the most terrible of the earlier scenes

of the war. To him John often tried to explain the difference between the atmosphere of Paris and London.

"They are not so serious in England?" asked his friend.

"In a way they are more serious," John had answered. "They are, at any rate, more worried. This, for example"—they were at the *Théâtre Français* and John waved his hand at the audience—"is not possible in London."

"There are no theatres in London?"

"On the contrary, there are too many theatres. But you could not collect in London to-day an audience like this, which has come here for reasonable recreation and refreshment. The people here are really amusing themselves in the intervals of their national business. They are doing their work, and they can take a holiday. Now we English—I mean, of course, the civilian English—cannot amuse ourselves in a natural and normal way. Either we forswear amusement altogether as incompatible with the terrible seriousness of the war, or we rush to the other extreme and shrill with laughter at nothing at all. Our theatres are either shut or they are packed with people who are trying to forget."

"I see. Your conscience is not good."

"We haven't as yet anything settled or fixed to go upon. Our spirits vary with the evening papers. I am amazed at the equable temper of Paris. Everyone here seems to have got into a fixed relation with the war."

"The Germans are in France."

"I wonder if that explains it altogether."

"We had little to boast of in France before the Germans came. But to-day I am proud."

Later that same evening, as John sat with his friend in rooms near the Madeleine, he firmly grasped the nettle of his own particular case.

"What is the attitude of France," he asked, "to the man who serves his country as an *embusqué*?"

"He is pitied."

"You mean he is despised?"

"Not at all. He has his orders. It is his misfortune not to be serving with the armies."

"What does he feel about it himself?"

"He shrugs his shoulders. France requires him to be where he is."

"I have had from the French Press rather a different impression."

"That was earlier in the war. Many excited

things were said. Some men wanted glory, and others avoided death. But that is finished. Only one thing matters to-day—the thing which France requires. The spirit is everything. The spirit is more than the uniform. We all desire the uniform to-day, but not all of us can wear it.”

John, as he picked his way carefully back to his hotel that night, took from this last speech the cue he needed. His personal hankerings were stilled. His country did not require him as a soldier. But he had work to do which he honestly thought was serviceable work. He was clearly bound to accept it. His vaguely heroic desires were a selfish crying for the moon.

He came from under the black bulk of the Madeleine and walked towards the river. By the time he had reached the wide, dark space of La Concorde he had divested his ambitions of all pomp and circumstance. Ever afterwards he associated his recovered honesty and peace with the deep silence of Paris as she lay that night, tranquil and assured behind her fighting men. He lingered upon the bridge, over against the Chamber of Deputies, passing in review all he had seen of the sleeping city in the last few days—young men waiting for the call, women filling without fuss all

possible gaps in the line, soldiers who had given all they had, as men pay debts that are due.

Paris, seen thus in a hundred crowding details, remembered and confirmed in fresh revelations during the next few days, revealing in her shuttered streets, in the quiet work of her women, in her responsible and intelligent reception of each small incident of the field of war, in her miraculous economy and phlegm, in the grave resolution of a nation which had come to terms with its burden—this Paris had dispelled his last misgivings when John departed into the country and towards the armies.

XX

FOUR MEMORABLE MOMENTS

JOHN afterwards remembered most clearly four notable moments in his journey. The first was when he stood upon the bridge in Paris. The second was when he stood within the orchard of the farm at Champfleury whence von Kluck had watched the turn of the great battle of the Marne.

He had eluded the kind and eloquent people who were willing to show him everything as it had occurred; and he stood now alone, where a few months before the German Staff had stood, looking out over a few of the most dearly prized acres in France.

Champfleury was a spot which seemed to have been specially designed by thoughtful destiny to be historic. It commanded the country like a well-placed seat in an amphitheatre; and it seemed to inherit, as though by right, the tremendous associations which will henceforth be inseparable from its name.

Behind John, as he faced the land on which the French had turned at bay, was the farm itself, scarred and shattered. He stood in the shade of a tree into the branches of which the officers of the German Staff had jammed an iron green-painted chair, the better to observe the fighting. Paris had trembled in the scale as they watched, for it was exactly here that the plan of the German Staff first went astray.

John was naturally prone to those sentiments which love to brood upon the vesture of deeds which previously have stirred the mind from a distance. He could not deny the thrill of his present contact with events which only a few months previously he had followed upon the map, and reached after in imagination. The broken trees of the orchard, the ruin of the near buildings and the worn grass, filled him with a sense of nearness to history, almost of personal touch with the things whose traces were all about him.

He had first surrendered to it as he stood among the wreckage of the room behind him, looking from the table where von Kluck had distracted himself with billiards to the fragments of a French *obus* which had plastered the four walls with the stuffing of the General's favourite chair; and he had come

from the house to indulge to the full his memories of this fatal time at Champfleury. They returned to him from those wild days in London when every small message from the front was seized by an anxious public. His greedy and hitherto unsatisfied imagination fed upon the actual setting and upon intimate relics of things it had so often attempted to body forth.

It was then that John was for the last time revisited by an old distress. He envied the men whose feet had tramped down this grass; who had made the hot events in whose ashes his fancy now was raking for some spark of warmth; who had contributed to make the ground on which he stood a place of pilgrimage for a curious posterity.

But a quick reaction left him proof against all further rage. Hitherto he had seen at Champfleury only a distracting evidence of swift and clamorous events with which he had always desired to be somehow related. But now, as the anger and envy in him died, he noticed things of a deeper significance than was suggested by material vestiges of the German occupation.

He had often read of the speed with which the ravages of war were effaced by time and by the normal activities of peace. On the way to Champ-

fleury he had naturally looked for signs of the fighting. He found them here and there in a shattered tree, or tree trunk drilled with a shell. He found them in the villages whose houses were spattered with small fire, or whose buildings were occasionally wrecked. But he soon realised that in the open country—even where the fiercest fighting had taken place—it would be possible—except for one recurring proof—to cross the entire area of the battlefield of the Marne without suspecting that anything unusual had occurred. The trenches and shell pits had been filled in. All the spoil and litter had been cleared away. Crops or pasturage were growing over the face of the entire country. The sole witnesses that remained were the graves of the fallen.

He had not realised the full bearing of this till now, at Champfleury, he could look out over the entire country and follow the whole course of the fighting to and fro on the slopes beneath him.

As he followed the fighting from field to field John gradually began to perceive a homely reason for the disappearance of all traces of the battle. The graves of the French soldiers were conspicuously marked with little flags of the tricolour. The whole country was bright and astir with their

flickering. Beside them, or aloof, were the gaunt black crosses above the German dead. But it was not these conspicuous signs on which the eye finally came to rest. It was rather the bent forms of old men and women, tilling the fields.

Here John was again brought sharply in contact with the calm sense of a nation to whom the war was a sober matter of every day. France, invaded and embattled, had yet to live, and make the most of her recovered acres. She had accordingly set to work, on the morrow of her shining victory, to smooth out the tracks of war, and to plant, right up to the edge of the graves of her fallen soldiers, crops for the coming season. Here again was the same spirit which John had found in Val de Grace. But here the spirit was expressed to the physical eye. The invisible idealism of France lit the whole of that country-side with the colour and movement of her flag; and, hard by, typical of the practical sense of a nation engrossed upon a specific and necessary task, her peasants were harvesting.

Here was France expressed in little; and, as upon the bridge at Paris, John was humbled. His heady visions of an active share in heroic and fine events paled into shabbiness.

Driving down the hill from Champfleury, he resisted the impression he had received from those graves, close bordered by the crops, only so far as to ask whether he were not indulging a sense for meanings which largely were self-created. These peasants, whom he found so expressive, might, after all, be expressing little beyond the callousness of minds incorrigibly rustic. Possibly they were indifferent to their dead.

This doubt was itself resolved as he pulled up his horse beside one of the larger graves of the soldiers killed in the pursuit towards the Aisne. He had stopped his horse the better to listen to a sound he had not yet heard—a sound strangely solemn in the evening dusk—hollow, and deep, and seeming to fall on the air like the blow of a heavy bar of muffled iron. It was the sound of distant artillery, and it made every other sound seem impertinent.

As he listened he was aware of steps coming down the narrow road. An old man came into view, carrying his tools. He came forward towards the carriage, paused a moment beside the large grave by the side of the road, and removed his hat. He had been working all day in the fields beneath Champfleury.

He stood almost within reaching distance of the wheels; and John, looking down upon his muddied boots and clothes, wondered what sad thoughts were in him, thus pausing beside the grave. Instinctively he, too, removed his hat.

The man turned at this, and lifted to John a face bitten by time and the wind. But the eyes were young and bright, and these, to John's surprise, were not saddened by what they saw at the grave-side.

The old man indicated his bare head with a shrug, almost apologetic, and with a gesture towards the grave:

"*Ils le méritent*," he said, and turned with an adieu to go down the hill.

His steps faded down the dip of the road, and John heard again the solemn note of a far gun.

The encounter, as he pondered it, sitting erect in the increasing dark, filled him with a deep disgust of his further pilgrimage. What right had he to share even in the homage of that old man, rendered without false elevation, without the embellishment of any fine sentiment or flourish. He felt beside that grave, within hearing of the guns, more than ever like a tourist—an intruder

into events and places where his own particular work neither invited nor excused him.

This was the third notable moment of his journey.

He turned his horse, and drove quickly back upon his tracks towards the town of Meaux.

The fourth and last moment occurred to him upon the following day. He had risen early in Meaux, and, down by the river, he had talked with several men of the district who had asked him many questions. They inquired especially concerning that English army which had suddenly filled the town in a famous summer week less than a year ago and had mysteriously disappeared while the townsmen slept. They wanted to know concerning the strange warriors, *aux petits jupons*, whom they imagined to have come from some far outpost of the British Empire.

Then, when the town had settled to its work, John lingered upon the bridge of the mill, and watched in fancy the passing of the tired English, now almost at the end of their wonderful retreat from Mons. This was the first English ground he had stood upon in France. It was English work—that ruined arch of the bridge.

"The first English ground," John repeated to

himself, and asked himself whether it should not also be the last. He had turned back upon his journey into ruined France, because he could no longer bear to be an intruder. He was asking himself whether this same sense that had come to him of being shamefully a sightseer would not equally follow him, with his military papers, into the English lines. France speaking to him in the simple gesture and phrase of a peasant going about his work among the heroic dead—a peasant who had shown himself in so simple a fashion as grateful to these dead for the acres they had redeemed and seemed still to be watching from their graves—had shamed him from treating her labour and strife as fodder for his needs.

How did this bear upon his intention to follow up his English quest?

He spied a landing-stage with light river boats moored to the edge of it. It had once been his habit, when he was at Oxford and wished to come to a resolution, to take a boat far down the river. The rhythm of his exercise, spaced with quiet intervals when even the leap of a fish rudely shattered the silence, had in the past solved him many a problem. The mind awoke by snatches to discover that a further stage had been reached.

The boats upon the Marne reminded John of this former habit. He went down to the river and hired a skiff from the boy of twelve who now was managing the business.

He had soon left behind him every trace of the town. The peace of the river was deep, for the fields which bordered it were emptied of their men.

In the pauses of his rowing John found himself, in the old way, putting aside his problem, allowing it to settle itself quietly in his mind. Ostensibly he was interested in the drop of a rat from his hole in the high bank; in the distress of a blackbird—surely an English blackbird; in the darting of a water-fly; in an unknown flower which grew upon the margin. Yet he began to be aware, gradually, and without a conscious disputing, that when he turned his boat towards Meaux he would be turning it towards England and his work.

The last point touched in his progress brought him to a wide reach of the river between banks unusually high. The water was deep, and the current hardly perceptible. He rested his oars on the water and waited for the silence and for the tiny noises which broke it in the way he loved.

But when the rattle of the water under his bows was stilled, and the silence fell, it was a silence less

complete than hitherto. Above him on the far bank there was—it seemed—a jingle of horses driven, and the voice of a man who urged them. The bank was too high to bring the horses as yet into view, but the sounds of their approach grew each moment louder.

John waited for them to top the bank. The bank itself lay mirrored on the water, absurdly clear. It was impossible to tell where the reality met its image, and the bank seemed in the invisible water to be twice its actual height. Then suddenly the horses appeared—magnificently bold against the sky, deep chestnut and with huge flanks straining at the plough. The old man who followed them skirted the river for a time, so that their progress was pictured in the water for several yards. Finally the reflection with its origin diminished, and the loud jingle and creak of the harness was suddenly muted by the intervening bank.

John began almost unconsciously to swing out his boat into the stream, to be turned about by a faint current which ran upon his own side of the river.

He could not positively say that this sudden and stalwart apparition of France, peacefully ploughing her battlefields almost in the eye of war, determined the moment of his resolution to return.

But this was the fourth moment of his pilgrimage; and he afterwards remembered it as the precise moment in which he decided that, unless he could intrude among the English armies as one devoted to their daily business, he would not intrude at all.

By the time he had sighted the stern of his boat upon a mark which would take him into the next reach of the river he was quite definitely striking out for Paris and for England.

XXI

THE SANCTUARY IN DEVON

THE morning which Pelham saw from his window some three months after his arrival in Devonshire as he dressed for breakfast would have dismayed him in town; for it was grey and sunless. But it made the beauty of this Devon hermitage more delicate. The mists which curled and drifted about the sea, the extravagant green and red of the broken cliffs veiled by the saturated air, the uniform sky revealed on the floor of the sea as compact of moving lights and shadows, the impression of fertility and refreshment conveyed by the steaming vapour which in cities was nauseous fog—these things were well worth exchanging for the obvious comforts and colours of the sun.

They had planned that day—Pelham and Graham and Phrene—a trip by boat to a beach in Cornwall; and Pelham, as they ran out from the little bay which lay at the foot of his friend's estate, felt, as often he had felt before, that here

indeed he might escape, if escape were possible. The sea filled him. The ancient life of the fishermen upon the beach; the mere fact that the morning newspapers had not yet come in; the presence of Phrene and Graham absorbed in one of the frequent renewals of their content; the freshened capacity in himself under the stimulus of change and relief to enjoy and think and vaguely to plan his work—all helped him to escape the problem from which three months previously he had fled.

They ran up upon a beach of shingle—the water light green and marvellously clear. They sat upon the stones, and Graham began throwing pebbles vigorously at a rock in the middle distance. Pelham admired his athletic gesture. He told himself that when so likely a fighter sat thus idle and free he at any rate need feel no pricking of the heart. Then he frowned, for he realised that yet again his obsession had reared and struck him.

Graham turned abruptly and said: "Well, Jimmy, how do you like it?"

"It's perfect," said Pelham.

"There's one thing I shall never do," said Graham—"I shall never return to town."

Pelham wondered whether this were pure enthusiasm for the sun now striking the sea with

beams of yellow mist, or whether there was in this announcement a sense of exile. Graham had loved all things, and not least he had loved his happy, swift excursions into the life of London. He had never wanted for invitations when he came to town, and he had never yet missed the best weeks of the season.

"You couldn't return to town even if you wanted to," said Pelham; "there is no such thing as town."

"Your English town is always bad," said Phrene.

"It has always admired you, Phrene," retorted Pelham.

"It has admired me as a statue," said Phrene. "As a woman it hasn't admired me at all. I'm going to bathe."

She went with Graham to a hollow in the rock. Pelham lay idle, watching the sea, which changed every moment its light and colour. The sun was now dispersing the last of the mist, which smoked reluctantly upon a headland to the east. Before the swimmers had come down to the sea the pebbles were warm.

He watched them vanishing round the edge of the bay. Phrene, taking the water, openly rejoiced. The pleasure she had in herself was never so insolent as when she swam.

Pelham, left alone, and afraid of being thrown back into himself, forced himself to dwell upon his friend. How right and wise was Graham to find here the fullness of life.

He saw them again soon, flashing towards him in a race. Their arms were lifted dripping, and disappeared. They came out of the water breathless and glistening.

The three of them lunched at the edge of the sea. The rocks on which they spread their food were dedicated to an old smuggler who all through the Napoleonic wars had run his boat into this bay and defeated the coastguards by ruses which still were the theme of the countryside.

Pelham, listening to these tales, reflected between the lines that here was a local hero who, when his country was at war, cheated it of a necessary revenue. Clearly war was not always so seriously taken. War was the business of an army and a government. The modern view of war as everyone's affair was the general voice of an unbalanced mind. London was not a healthy place. It made men morbid and destroyed their sense of proportion.

They chaffed him for not wanting to bathe.

"How you resist it I can't imagine," said Phrene waving at the lit sea with a sandwich.

"He never could stand a shock," said Graham. "He's a Laodicean; and his doom in the next world will be to stand shivering, up to his middle in the tideless sea."

Graham meant nothing at all by this; but Pelham miserably applied his metaphor to the subject which obsessed him.

Would he never get away, be safe from these actions and reactions? He squirmed on the pebbles.

They put back to the house in a rising wind. The little boat required careful handling in the heavy water, and the journey was not without excitement. They rounded the edge of the bay in a whirl of spray.

They could not immediately land, for the fishermen on the beach were dragging a seine net. They stood off a little and watched.

The scene was so remote from to-day—all its furnishings so ancient and its progress so self-engrossed—that Pelham, after his scamper through the waves, felt that the burden had again rolled from his mind. Here he would eventually be able to forget; to bring his instincts logically to heel.

The net came to shore, and there was a lively reckoning as to the size and value of the jerking fish.

Graham thrust in the boat, and they hauled it up the shingle. Then they stood for a while, watching the fishermen and listening to their talk—talk salted with a wit which was quick and fearless, alive with the cut-and-thrust of lively and wilful opinions. Their language had almost as little changed as their manners since their ancestors had put to sea in the amateur fleet of Lord Howard.

The whole scene filled Pelham with a tremulous happiness. He had escaped—escaped for the twentieth odd time in three months. He was getting to know these men, and already he could share some part of their immemorial life. He could even understand at this moment Graham's determination to return no more to town. "Town" had become a cheap, superficial and distant thing upon this windy beach, within beat of the sea, busy with a brave, perpetual labour. They turned away, and, in the falling dusk, began to go up the beach.

"By Jove!" Pelham suddenly cried out. "I'm glad indeed that I came to this place."

They weathered the cliff, and the noise of the surf was lost.

Then Phrene pointed quietly to a figure which was waiting for them on the terrace of the house.

Pelham drew near, and quivered a little as a renewed desolation swept back into the calm he had won.

Baddeley was waiting for them on the terrace, and Baddeley was in khaki.

XXII

THE SANCTUARY INVADED

ALL that Pelham had suffered, and much of what he had successfully kept at bay during the last three months in Devonshire returned upon him now and threatened to submerge him.

Baddeley's sudden apparition in uniform hit him sharply on a rawly sensitive place. It had the air of being a stroke of Fate. He had fled from London (he had to admit now that he had fled); and still he was hunted—hunted and struck again just as he seemed to be escaping.

He fortified himself in a resolute anger.

"Curse Baddeley!" he said, as he fumbled with his tie.

He felt that Baddeley was an enemy who had tracked him down. He thought of him as a creditor who pursued a debt.

Baddeley had never yet been able to do anything competently. His telegram must needs go astray, and he must needs surprise them in

a martial costume for which none of them was prepared.

Why had he come here, of all places? How had he come unfastened from his foolish wife? Would he make a proselyte of Graham? Pelham began to argue aloud, disjointedly, as he finished off his civilian toilet.

"What is Baddeley to me? . . . Let Baddeley be a warrior if it pleases him. . . . I must warn Phrene. . . . Graham is in rather a bad way. . . . If Graham were to go . . . That would be a nasty one."

His mind went in a maddening circle; and, as he turned the handle of the door, he said to himself, in a parting remark:

"Jimmy, you fool, you're not feeling very well. You've got to pull yourself together."

He found Baddeley talking with Phrene in the drawing-room.

Baddeley was offensively radiant. He had a boisterous eye and a shining face. Pelham examined him, morosely vigilant for opportunities to be unkind.

"I like the life," Baddeley was saying, as Pelham approached; and Phrene asked, with the faintest of irony:

"What exactly is that? I mean what exactly is it you call the life?"

"He means forming fours and drinking tea out of a pannikin," said Pelham. "After several years in a Government office it must seem a dashing sort of existence."

"It's doing me no end of good," said Baddeley in perfect good humour. "I feel as fit as a fiddle."

Graham entered, and they went into the dining-room.

Dinner was not a happy meal. Graham was abstracted. Pelham was as nearly hysterical as a man can be; and Phrene was clouded. Baddeley on the other hand, could not talk enough. When Phrene had left them he took his friends by main force into his confidence.

"I suppose," he said, as the door was closed behind Phrene, "that you fellows want to know all about it."

There was a long silence, indecently blank.

"I mean," went on Baddeley, puffing happily at his cigar, "you are quite naturally curious as to why I have suddenly got into khaki."

"I suppose you've joined the army," Pelham politely suggested.

"As you say, James," said Baddeley, unruffled.

"I have joined the army and"—here he levelled his cigar at Graham—"I have saved my soul alive. I'll tell you about it."

"You needn't, unless you like," Pelham assured him.

"Jimmy," said Graham in a loud aside, "Baddeley is our guest. If he wants to tell us about his soul we can't very well prevent him. Let Baddeley testify."

Baddeley watched them.

"I'm a bit slow," he said when Graham had finished, "and doubtless lacking in that keen sense of the ridiculous which is Jimmy's especial gift, but I can read you fellows pretty well."

"He has divination and the gift of tongues," said Pelham.

Baddeley sipped his wine.

"I'm not going to prophesy," he quietly began, "I'm simply pointing to myself. A few weeks ago I was a comfortable clerk, absolutely settled. There was no more adventure for me—nothing but good meals and an assured income. I had accepted the life of a safe and respectable Government servant of middle age. I loved the money I was saving. I enjoyed my beef and beer. I read the best fiction, and played a good game of chess. I

lived the life of a 'mean, sensual man' and I was content."

He paused a moment.

"Even as these publicans," Pelham softly interjected.

Baddeley suddenly rose from his chair. There came almost a passion into his words. He had begun in jest, but his Scottish blood was up. He began to glow with an enthusiasm which was more religious than he knew. Essentially, now, he was bearing witness.

"I've broken loose," he continued; "and it was a hard thing to do. I make no secret of that. Morally I was out of condition—all soft and pliable; I had to stop revolving upon my own centre and to find another; and I tell you fellows in perfect seriousness that I've begun to understand what religious people mean by conversion."

He paused, realising, half sheepishly, how serious he had become.

There was no doubt at the last of his emotion—the fierce proselytising emotion of a Puritan Scot. Graham shrank inwardly. Something in Pelham leaped at the throat of the man who so flagrantly preached at him.

He rose and stood beside the mantelpiece. Baddeley, his hand shaking a little, flicked the ash from his cigar, and sat down in his chair. Pelham stood insolently at ease.

"Is that all you have to say?" he asked of Baddeley.

"I've said enough," said Baddeley. His fire had gone out and he sat back smouldering.

"Very well," said Pelham. "Now we will talk sense."

Graham stirred uneasily. He saw in Pelham a temper he would be sorry to have loose upon a guest.

"Suppose we drop it," he said. "Phrene will wonder what's become of us."

"One moment," said Pelham. "I haven't much to say. Baddeley has chosen to tell us about his soul, and I'm going to put him right. He seems to believe that he's sacrificing his ease on behalf of an idea. He's doing nothing of the kind."

Baddeley sat up in his seat. Pelham was bringing fuel to a fire which might otherwise have gone out. Baddeley no longer smouldered. He threatened to blaze, and Graham expected a scene. He remembered how years ago these two men had invariably enraged one another.

"Be careful, Jimmy," said Baddeley, gripping the elbows of his chair. "No one knows better than you that I'm simply doing what every fellow ought to do."

"Let it alone," Graham expostulated.

"I want to explain to Baddeley," said Pelham, "that he has deprived his country of the services of an administrative expert and offered her instead the services of a useless warrior."

"Admitting I might really have been more useful in the Foreign Office," retorted Baddeley, "I should have thought you at any rate might have left that side of the matter severely alone."

"What exactly do you mean by that?" asked Pelham.

The question was a reflex from Baddeley's thrust, but Baddeley was quite willing to explain.

"You aren't exactly making yourself useful, are you?" he said.

For an instant Graham thought that Pelham would spring physically at his enemy. But Pelham mastered himself, and said in a voice which he kept with difficulty under control:

"I admit that, so far as I am not employed under Government, I am more liable than yourself to join the army. But I haven't any very pressing

private reasons for doing so as a voluntary amateur of war. I am quite aware that other people are finding the war an excellent means of escape from the tedium of home life, from the paralysis of middle age, or from unfortunate domestic embarrassments——”

Baddeley reared like a whipped horse.

“Which of these things,” he broke in, “do you particularly apply to me?”

“You may have them all if you like,” said Pelham. “You say you left the Foreign Office to save your soul. I think you might have saved your soul in a more manly fashion than by bolting into the army.”

“I’m damned if I’ll hear another word,” said Baddeley, rising in a passion. “Your devilish tongue’s about the limit.”

“I’ve said some true things in my time,” said Pelham complacently; “and I’ll just add another to the list.”

Baddeley turned at the door.

“It’s just this,” said Pelham quietly. “If ever I got into such a beastly state as to regard a European war in the light of an opportunity to save my wretched little soul, I shouldn’t go and shoot the Germans. I should shoot myself.”

But the door had shut upon Baddeley's retreat. Pelham, unable to halt immediately, continued, ostensibly to Graham:

"Our guest has bolted again. He bolts into the trenches because he hasn't the capacity to deal with himself at home. And now he's bolted into your drawing-room because he's afraid of hearing the truth."

Graham had risen.

"Shall we go in?" he said.

Pelham, thus arrested, felt the life go out of him. The two men saw in each other's eyes a secret which neither would confess.

Graham abruptly switched off the light.

XXIII

THE BARRIERS BREAK DOWN

PELHAM in Phrene's drawing-room covered his distraction as well as he could; but the effort became continually more impossible. Graham drifted about the room, showing Baddeley some of his things. Phrene at intervals played and sang at the piano.

Pelham was struggling between two contrary ideas. He was sure he had been strictly just to Baddeley, but he wanted to apologise.

Then his thoughts began to fester inwardly. He went to the window and drew the curtain.

The sea was falling under the moon in loud surf upon the pebbles. The rocks and the fishermen's boats with their clear shadows were etched upon a dazzling background, where wet shingle had been left by a retreating tide. The tenuousness and grace of the lit water offered relief to a shuttered brooding.

Pelham slipped out on to the terrace quietly

and went down to the sea. The noise of his steps was soon lost in the noise of the water. He rounded a rock left dry by the tide and sat in a sheltered corner of the beach.

He emptied his mind of all thought, the better to allow the monotony and power of the sea to work upon him. He tried to lose all sense of his particular self in a vague contemplation of universal space and light and sound. He submitted to the rhythm of the waves. He endeavoured to cut himself away from the present, to abolish time, and lose all sense of his confinement to an English shore. The stern of a boat beached on the farther side of the point he had rounded climbed to the moon above him. A beaten and worn sail, furled upon its mast, lay horizontally, and thrust at the sea. It gave to the boat the appearance of a rostrum. Was there anything here, indeed, to suggest a later thing than Rome. He might have sat thus under the walls of Tarentum, Carthage, or Piræus, to which cities by virtue of all he had thought or read he as surely belonged as to the land of his birth.

For a while there was nothing to disturb his quiet mooning. Then, gradually, he became aware of tiny intrusions into the swept house of

his brain. He hunted them through the chambers, and they vanished, leaving him to dream again. But they returned, little biting creatures, or forms that were vague and large. It became a constant effort to keep his mind clear of them.

At last into an interval of tranquillity broke the rattle of stones and a cry of shingle pressed and scattered. Pelham looked up, and saw Graham walking beside the sea.

Pelham shrank into the shadow of the rock. He had a horror of being found out there.

Graham stood looking towards the sea. He seemed at last like an ebony statue, for he stood so still and so long, and his shadow lay with the shadows of the rocks.

At last he turned, and for the second time that evening he and Pelham were face to face with the truth.

Neither of them spoke. Graham came quietly up the beach and flung himself down.

He played with the stones, building small castles, childishly idle.

Then, suddenly, he swept his arm over what he had built and looked at Pelham.

"Jimmy," he said, "the game's up. I'm finished."

His voice forbade all further trifling. Pelham's first defensive impulse to misunderstand, and avoid the threatened crisis, shrivelled under Graham's steady look. Pelham went directly to the point.

"Have you spoken to Phrene?" he asked.

"Phrene will understand," said Graham quickly, but there was no conviction in him.

"Phrene will not understand," said Pelham. "At least you mustn't count upon it. Phrene is really and in fact what you have only pretended to be. The war for her means nothing more nor less than fighting. She regards fighting as an experience which every man ought to have. But you have had it already. She will simply regard you as deserting her for better fun elsewhere."

"Phrene will understand," persisted Graham.

"Phrene," said Pelham quietly, "understands a good deal. But she will not understand why a voluntary system of recruiting compels an Englishman to fight for England."

He paused; but Graham had nothing to urge.

"We have no real right," Pelham went on, "to expect that Phrene will comprehend instinctively the mind of a Christian Englishman—more particularly the mind of a Christian Englishman who

has always denied that he is anything of the kind! You've protested for months that the war is no concern of yours. You've now got to convince Phrene that it is."

Graham silently allowed the truth of this. Pelham gripped him by the arm.

"Old boy," he said, "we're in the same boat. We're getting rid of our dead selves; only your dead self happens to be married."

There was another silence. Pelham caught greedily at the keen relief of an unwonted frankness, after months of avoidance. He wanted now to invite and exchange confidences on the theme from which for weeks past he had doubled like a hare.

"When did it begin?" he asked excitedly. "When did you begin to know that the game was up?"

"I have known from the first," said Graham. "There was nothing to hold me back—except Phrene. I have thrown off the other trash."

Then he added hastily: "I don't mean there was nothing in our views. But I've simply failed to live up to them. They were one half pretence, and the other half mere insolence. I thought I could be magnificent and exceptional. But as soon

as something big came along I found myself pulled along with the dear old multitude. I've either got to 'fall in' with the others or live uncomfortably for the rest of my life."

Pelham, as he listened to Graham, heard the voice of his own conscience proclaiming in open terms lurking truths which obscurely had undermined his protesting wilfulness. The truth was out at last under the sky. His relief was incredible. He could have shouted. Why had he wrestled so foolishly when at the last he was so gladly beaten?

"Willoughby," he burst out, "you at least had Phrene. But I have had nothing at all except my own conceit."

"I've often wondered about you," said Graham, looking at his friend. "I knew it was bound to be with you rather an agonising affair. All your brains were against you."

"Exactly," said Pelham. "And they won crowning victories every time, their last engagement ending in a complete discomfiture of Baddeley. We might even call it a Pyrrhic victory."

"And now," said Graham, rising from the stones, "I take it you're going to look for a commission."

Pelham detected in his friend's voice an envy that the problem for him should be so simple. He took Graham's arm as they turned to walk up the beach. He was anxious for his friend.

"Leave me out of it," he said, and then abruptly added:

"What are you going to do yourself?"

Graham did not answer. He seemed to be listening.

Above the sound of the sea, and dividing the intimate thread of their talk, Pelham heard that Phrene was singing.

They ascended to the terrace and entered the house.

XXIV

THROUGH SACRIFICE TO FULFILMENT

THE next morning Baddeley was due to leave by an early train. Graham drove with him to the station, and to Baddeley's surprise Pelham, at the last moment, also jumped into the fly. Pelham noted the expression of his late antagonist.

"Don't be alarmed," he said cheerfully. "I'm coming to apologise."

Baddeley looked more closely at Pelham and saw a change in him.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"By no means," said Pelham.

His eyes were dancing with an amused confession.

"We shall meet on some stricken field," he added.

Baddeley turned to Graham. He did not intend an inquiry, but it was written in his looks. Pelham spoke for his friend.

"That's all right," he said. "Willoughby is also by way of being saved; but Willoughby"—

here his voice sank under an affectionate solicitude which redeemed his profaning of the text—"but Willoughby," he repeated, "has great possessions."

They did not speak again. Graham affected a preoccupation with his horse. They topped the steep hill which shut out the fast world of steam, and began to run down into the valley. To Pelham it seemed as though, after having retired into the wilderness, they had suddenly come again within reach of cities. The wayside station linked them up with things. His decision of the night before, from being a passionate interior experience, now appeared concrete and prosaic. He would have to make his arrangements.

When Baddeley had gone, and they were returning over the hill, Pelham secretly wondered whether Graham had yet said anything to Phrene. He had watched her narrowly the night before, after they had come in from the beach, and she had puzzled him. She had smiled frequently, as though she enjoyed a superior thought.

They had reached the summit of the cliff when Graham spoke. His house lay far below. Graham was going down to his problem. The smoke from the village chimneys stood in the little valley like grey stalagmites.

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"I spoke to Phrene last night," said Graham at last.

Pelham waited, and Graham went on after a pause:

"I spoke to her, and that's about all there is to it."

"But what did you say?" asked Pelham.

"I said there was something we should have to discuss."

"And Phrene?"

"You noticed Phrene last night?"

"I have never seen her more perfectly lovely."

"Well, she smiled, and asked me to forget all about it for twenty-four hours."

"I see," said Pelham; "and the rest is not for publication."

They were silent again. Pelham wondered what would happen when Phrene's hour had struck. He could not quite understand her now. Had she simply petitioned for another perfect day; or did she hope that when Baddeley had gone she might recover Graham?

He repeatedly asked that question through the day. Phrene seemed to hold a secret, and to enjoy herself inwardly. She looked frequently at Graham with a teasing affection. At times she appeared to

Pelham like a woman who punishes a child. He began to doubt whether they might not possibly be misreading her.

The evening came with light, warm winds and a late moon. Pelham did not want to leave Graham before everything was settled; but he was also impatient to get away.

He had begun to think of Diana. He had thought of her immediately on leaving Graham the night before.

He was mastered by an intense reaction, the result of his long resistance. When first he had thought of Diana in his room at night a swift abjection had flung him mentally upon his knees.

He had thought of her again when, after their return from the station, he saw Graham and Phrene again swimming in the sunlight. The feeling that he made an unnecessary third in the intimate crisis about to arise between them brought Diana inevitably to mind. He wondered at his late perversity. He had sold Diana for a song, though he had secretly known she mattered most to him.

The evening passed, and Graham had not spoken. They dined; and after Phrene had left the

dining-room the two men walked silently on the terrace. At last Pelham stopped abruptly.

"Willoughby," he said, "I'm going to write letters in my room for at least two hours."

"I see," said Graham, "this is an outburst of tact. Incidentally you are leading a horse to the water."

Pelham walked quickly away, and Graham fell back a while into his thoughts.

He had lately come to hate all that he had and all that he was. Phrene alone remained. Yesterday, when he was showing one of his treasures to Baddeley, he had suddenly desired to dash it violently to the ground. It represented, along with his other treasures, ten years of ardent connoisseurship. It stood for exactly that personal delicacy and distinction which had made for him an ivory palace of art built high above common rumour. It had set him aloof, and had flattered his refinement. He had made himself very rare, professing a creed which denied him a coarse fellowship with the multitude.

And now he detested it all—all except Phrene, who, even though he closely associated her with the wreck of his old ideas, mysteriously survived them. He dreaded to lose one ray of her. That she would

consent without foolish anger or an evil grudge he knew well enough. But he could not believe that she would gladly consent. He could not hope that he would carry her good will with him. She had held herself curiously aloof from his misgivings. She had seemed simply to watch him. She eluded his efforts to implicate her one way or the other. Frequently he had found her anxious, sometimes he had detected in her a muffled rebellion, and at other times he had suspected a lurking amusement.

Last night she had simply used her power, with a curiously bitter delight in his subjection, to make him put aside his purpose. She desired to be once more acknowledged; he had never known her more intoxicating.

Pelham, as if in a whimsical insistence upon the crudity of his late hint, had walked, not into the house to write letters, but down to the beach to enjoy the sea. Graham, going in the opposite direction, found Phrene in her furs, waiting for him at the door of the drawing-room.

"You must take me to the top of the cliff," she said, as he came within speaking distance. "The night is too lovely."

"You will be cold," said Graham, wrapping the furs more closely about her.

"Then you can get me another cloak."

Graham went into the house and upstairs into Phrene's room. It was a room that expressed her, lit with colour and heavily fragrant with masses of cut flowers. As he went out of the room to meet his reckoning with her he looked about him in a weak farewell.

They climbed a deep lane to the top of the cliff. The dog roses shone in masses. There was a smell of wet earth, and last year's growth decayed and enriching its former soil. The sea met them at the top with a faint noise of the tide, with a wide expanse of water crossed by a wrinkled wake of moon, and with ghostly lines of surf running in a sudden hurry up the shingle.

They stood in a shadow of a high rock worn smooth and round as a castle keep by centuries of wind and rain. The perfection of what they saw might well have absorbed them. But to Graham there was something unlawful in the pleasure he still derived from it. His pleasure seemed to require a sanction. He remembered a desolate moment of the night before when suddenly his possession of Phrene when most it was perfect had also seemed to be unauthorised and incomplete. Why could he no longer feel that their life together

was enough? Then, in swift amazement, he realised that Phrene was uttering his own prevailing thought.

"Why is it impossible simply to enjoy things?" she said. She was looking to the sea.

He turned to her, and Graham was suddenly aware that his problem no longer existed. He could hardly believe it. He asked for confirmation.

"You mean?" he began.

"I mean why cannot we be satisfied with all this? Is it because we have never paid for it? Is it because we have never risked or suffered anything?"

"Then you too——" Graham began.

But in surprise and humiliation he stopped short. He realised he had never once in these last months seen things as Phrene had seen them. He had been ludicrously wrong about her. He had seen only his own side. He knew now that Phrene had a deeper reading of what was asked of them.

She looked at him as he abruptly stopped. She read his abasement and forgave him for his failure. But she was not immediately appeased. She began the longest speech of her life.

"I have a right to be angry," she said, "and I see that you admit it. You have thought of me

during these last months as simply standing in the way. You have absurdly divided your life into two parts. You have begun to acknowledge another loyalty than your loyalty to me; but you don't yet understand even now what you are doing. You imagine that you are turning away from all this"—she put out her hand towards the sea—"and that you are, in a sense, deserting me. That simply means that I am not yet really your wife. I am one of your possessions, like all those things down there in the house. But"—here she profoundly smiled, proud of her deep knowledge—"but I know better than that. You are not leaving the things which have made our life so happy; and you are not turning away from me. You are going to put a new meaning into all these things. You are going to discover that I am, indeed, your wife. Last night we were only half in touch; and I nearly succeeded—it was a bitter triumph—in making you forget your resolution to be entirely yourself. Henceforth you will know me better, or not at all. You are going to discover that there is in these hills, and in that water, and in me also, something which you have not yet seen. You are not turning away from your past. You are going to discover it."

She paused. Graham almost rose to the level of her sibylline mood. He had never so completely realised her strangeness—her ability, not at all English, to express herself in speech and gesture with an impressive opulence. He could have kneeled to her.

"I do not know," she went on after a pause that seemed to be bridged inaudibly, "why it should be necessary to put a thing in peril before we are able to value it. I simply know that I would rather have you go away from me now, and have you never return, than I would have you spend a hundred years with me here and never go at all. For, even if you never returned, you would have given to the days we have already had an immortality. I could not have said these things in this way a week ago. I rebelled at first and insisted upon the things we had. I opposed the necessity to pay. But I found that by refusing to surrender the things we had we should soon result in having nothing at all to surrender. Things are worth nothing till we are ready to lose them."

She ended, and Graham, amazed and shaken at the way in which she had grown out of his knowledge, was some time before he could measure how far she had transcended him. Finally he caught

for reassurance at the idea that at least their ways had, unknown to him, lain parallel.

"You too have struggled," he said at last. "And you too have come to see that we cannot escape the sacrifice."

"It is not a sacrifice," Phrene corrected him. "It is a fulfilment."

Then, to them both, the name they gave to the act no longer mattered. They were now agreed. They had come, by the same emotional way, to their decision—the way already taken by thousands of men and women in England, swiftly or gradually, deliberately or unaware, articulately or without a word—equally the way of a patriot sacrificing to his country or of a homeless Greek who had no country and regarded sacrifice as an evil thing. Graham had reached with Phrene that night a height where many philosophies have met before. Epicurus leads his disciples to the same austere necessity as the Nazarene.

They walked together for a while upon the cliff. This was their most perfect hour. Now that the thing was settled, and Graham knew that Phrene was the comrade of his enterprise, he found that his senses were opened afresh to the light of the sea and the smell of the land. Each moment

passed, rounded and complete. He discovered that the gorse beside them was in flower, that the turf sprang under his foot, that Phrene's dress had gathered leaves from the hedge. This was his reward. The earth was again his own, now that he was ready to surrender it. For months he had deliberately caught at every small thing in nature in order to escape the imperious call of a prompter within himself, and nature had denied him. She had blunted his senses and put over the world a veil which obscured her. But the veil was now withdrawn and nature was transfigured. Phrene was right. He had not really turned away from the world. He was setting out to discover the world.

At a turn of the lane, as at last they began to go down to the sea, he caught Phrene by the hands and looked at her for a time in silence. He saw the mist upon her hair, the line of her cheek against the hedge, the escape of her foot from the caught folds of her dress. When he had looked at her for a moment he released her hands and they went on down the hill. He did not desire to make love to her. Their mood was beyond it.

They walked on to the fresh rustle of the night air, the stir of leaves and grasses, the scent of farm

and field. The lane wound inland for a short distance to avoid a bluff of the headland, and they had lost for some time their view of the village.

An acrid smell of burning lingered here which reminded Graham of many an autumn smouldering and for the moment defeated his vernal impulses.

Then the village came into view, and they stopped in swift astonishment at what they saw.

A dense mass of smoke was pouring from the windows of Graham's house. The servants were hurrying to and fro, removing the furniture into the garden, and fishermen from the village were rushing into every open door and window with water.

The whole scene was lit by the moon, striking upon the outer smoke, which was blown and shredded into white and fleecy masses towards the sea. Graham had not yet recovered from his amazement when a bright tongue of flame curled venomously out of one of the higher windows.

They stood without speaking for several minutes; and saw that the fire was out of hand. Tiny jets of water from the hose were clearly making no impression. The building was richly timbered and the nearest fire station was three miles away over the hill.

Graham's first instinct on recovering from his first surprise was to hurry down the hill. He started forward, but Phrene put her hand upon his arm, detaining him.

He understood. She was looking intently down at the hurry and confusion beneath her, absorbed by the significance of the burning house. Already the flames were entirely claiming it, and disputing with the moonlight. Why should they spoil their present hour with fretting to save a few material shreds of the past? Graham saw Pelham actively directing the salvage so that in any case he himself could personally do very little.

They remained upon the hillside watching, as it seemed, their past life eaten and vanishing. Upon a silver background of sea, and of rocks and hedges turned black and bold by the fierce new light of the fire, their home stood out in fiery red and black. The tiny figures hurrying to and fro upon the lawn seemed to Graham in their ineffectual and busy zeal to resemble the little dark thoughts which in his own mind had darted about the inner citadel of his past during the long weeks of his indecision. All their hurry was of no avail to save what an elemental force had so obviously mastered. He could almost have shouted down the hill to bid these

restless figures stand back, and no longer fussily oppose the inevitable.

That was Phrene's window out of which the last great flame had roared. He remembered his farewell as he had left it not two hours ago. He knew now how ignoble was his former pang—a pang which had sprung out of his ignorance of Phrene and his disloyal conception of his pleasure in her as something thwarted by his call to a finer manhood. Yet it was difficult to repress a sudden sinking of the heart when he thought of that fragrant and haunted room blistered and distorted in the fire.

He turned to Phrene, but saw in her no trace of his own misgiving.

The men upon the lawn now stood back and watched. There was no more to be done. Burning beams were already falling, and at each fall the flames leaped and quivered. Masses of flames were suddenly detached from the fire and snatched into the air. Graham's moment of regret passed rapidly. He caught the mood of Phrene, who stood with her hands clasped in front of her, taking in every detail of the burning in her strangely vivid way. He began to rejoice in this amazingly apt and lovely presentment, in the concrete, of his interior drama.

By the time his house was ready to collapse in a fiery splendour Graham shared to the full the rapture of Phrene. When the moment came and the walls seemed suddenly to crumble and the roof to fall they looked at one another in the red light, possessed by the same inexpressible thought. The torch of their epithalamium was burning to an end; and in the swiftly fading light they were conscious as they went down the hill that they had entered into a second marriage.

XXV

TIDINGS FROM THE FRONT

AGNES did not live long in the solitary rooms in Mortimer Street. Kenneth John insisted, within a week of her perching there, that she should come and stay with Monica until Rivers returned. Neither he nor any of her friends took a tragic view of the accident which had parted her suddenly from Rivers.

For several days no news of Rivers came. Then they heard, in a heavily censored letter, that he was under orders to accept a special charge in an attack that was preparing. An immediate return was out of the question.

Agnes took the news bravely enough at first. She was proud, and even happy, to abstain from any signal of distress.

Between Agnes and Monica a warm friendship sprang up. Upon the side of Agnes it was based upon the comfort she derived from a more level temperament. Monica, on the other hand, divined

in Agnes a latent hysteria which appealed to her for assurance and protection. She intuitively feared for the future of Agnes, and secretly wished, for no reason she could definitely give, that Rivers would soon return.

As the days went by Agnes began to look with a keener expectation for more news, and to feel correspondingly disappointed when no news came beyond brief assurances that all was well. She had hot fits of joy out of all reason, followed by desolate reactions. There were times when the cold shadow of formal years in her father's house fell across her memory and filled her with misgiving. She exaggerated her secret outlawry, and felt herself menaced by things unknown.

Sometimes she came almost to the point of sending Rivers an urgent summons. She even came to wonder whether Monica guessed what had happened in the house-boat, or whether she would not be deeply scandalised if she were told of it. She sometimes found it hard to resist a quite gratuitous impulse to confess.

Then she heard from Rivers that he was to be moved to a quiet section of the line, and that he would soon be reasonably able to ask for leave.

It was three months since he had gone down the river from Twickenham.

The day after Agnes had received her letter John had a scrawl from Rupert Smith. Rivers had been struck down upon the day immediately preceding his removal. John brought the news to Monica as they were changing for dinner, and together they contemplated their terrible task as Agnes chattered with an almost painful excitement through an endless meal. Monica accepted the duty as her own, and John after dinner went to his study.

Agnes had that evening a feverish radiance. Now that the burden had rolled away she realised how heavy it had lain. A constriction had been removed. She breathed as she had not breathed before. She could not now deny that a curious fear had oppressed her—a fear which was almost a physical thing. The removal of this fear impelled her to an excess of joy in which she could hardly keep her secret. She could only with difficulty abstain from sharing with others the comedy which she and Rivers were about to play in derision of the rules.

"I am to be married to my own husband," she told herself, and she laughed with tears in her eyes.

Monica had long suspected something queerly hidden in Agnes. She had even questioned John as to what exactly had happened on the evening when Rivers had been called away. Agnes had not behaved like a woman whose marriage had merely been postponed. At any rate that postponement had, for her, been a very vital experience.

Now that the time had come for Monica to deliver her news, she was more than ever struck by her friend's behaviour. She instinctively felt that the message she had to deliver would mean for Agnes something different from the simple news that her betrothed had been killed in action.

They talked at first of trivial things, Monica desperately wondering how she could approach her task. She found the openings so rare, and so swiftly closed, as Agnes went from subject to subject, that she at last resolved to rush into the delivery of her message at the next opportunity, however slender it seemed.

Suddenly she realised that Agnes was talking of the casualty lists. Monica's heart stopped as she heard her friend speaking with a dreadful distinctness and relevance.

"You know, Monica, I once imagined that everyone first heard of their people being killed by

looking in the papers. And I used to wonder how a woman would feel suddenly and without warning to find the name there of the man who mattered."

"Agnes dear——" Monica began.

She could not control her voice, and Agnes, even in the midst of her racing monologue, was arrested. She looked across at Monica, and saw something in Monica's face that startled her. She waited.

"How do you think a woman ought to feel?" said Monica.

Agnes was struck serious.

"I don't think she would feel at all," she answered.

"I know how I should feel," said Monica, "I should feel proud."

"Are you quite sure of that? I think the pride would come afterwards."

"You mustn't say that, Agnes dear. Pride is the first thing—the greatest thing of all."

Agnes was suddenly frightened. Why mustn't she say this or that? She had begun to receive her message.

Her eyes were full of fear as Monica came quickly towards her.

"Tell me, tell me," Agnes whispered. "What has happened?"

There was a short silence, during which Agnes divined the truth. Monica was terrified by an increasing pain in the eyes which questioned her.

Suddenly Agnes stood up in her place, tightly drawn to her full height, her fists clenched to her sides.

"Tell me outright," she said. " You have heard something. He is dead."

Monica took her by the arms, and tried to make her sit down.

"Agnes dear," she pleaded, "let me help you to bear it."

But Agnes did not hear. She all at once had three clear and separated thoughts. They had the distinctness of things printed, and they stood out upon a background of absolute darkness. She saw them as in a schedule:

"I have lost him.

"I am not married.

"I am going to have a child."

XXVI

SOMETHING TO LIVE FOR

AGNES, in the fever that followed her collapse, was watched continually by Monica. Monica did not need the doctor's diagnosis to reveal to her the full truth. She had known it from the moment she had laid Agnes upon the sofa and rung for help; and she knew more than she liked to know as the night wore on and Agnes spoke, out of her fever, of the interior life through which she had lately passed. Frequently, in order that she might not hear what Agnes was saying, she busied her mind with plans for making things as easy as she could for her friend in the months to come. She wondered whether Agnes would have the courage to accept her position reasonably and quietly when she was well enough to realise it.

Then, after several anxious days, Monica one morning saw that Agnes was calmly awake and watching her. The sunlight made a pattern on the floor, and the room was cheerful with flowers.

Monica crossed to the bed, but Agnes was the first to speak.

"I suppose you know all about me now, Monica."

"Yes, dear. But you're not allowed to talk."

"I'm going to have a child, Monica. Do you know that?"

"My orders," said Monica, "are strict. You're not to worry."

"I'm not worrying," protested Agnes.

"I think I have always known what would happen," she continued. "That is why I kept him with me. Then, afterwards, I got into a panic. That was my father. But I am free of my father now. I sha'n't be afraid again."

She then went quietly to sleep.

One of the first visitors to see Agnes during her convalescence was her brother Henry.

The death of Rivers had already been published, and Rupert, home again upon leave, had shown it to Henry. Henry had received the news with a sharp pang for his sister's sake. Rupert, moreover, charged him with a mission. Rupert had been with Rivers at the time of his death, and had received from his friend a message with regard to Agnes. Rivers had died upon Rupert's promise to look

particularly to his sister. Rupert, before he visited Agnes, wanted to know whether she were fit to receive him. He feared lest the ordeal of their meeting, and the explanations, coming hard upon the news itself, would be too much for her. Henry had undertaken to inquire at Monica's house.

Agnes welcomed him gladly, propped among the pillows.

"It was good of you to come," she said. "But I am through with it now. I'm just going to get strong again."

She paused, and her eyes, unnaturally large above their dark rings, were looking at some hidden thing.

"Henry," she said quietly, "does father know anything about the night Bob went away?"

"Not that I know of," said Henry, a little awkwardly.

He was surprised that Agnes should herself allude to this. He continued:

"He, of course, knows nothing about our meeting in the house-boat."

After a short silence Agnes, with the calm of an invalid, drifting along her train of thought, said:

"Father will have to know about it, Henry."

Henry for a moment had lost the thread. Then, when he had recovered it, he had to pause a

moment before grasping the significance of his sister's remark. She watched him with a mild curiosity. She had so entirely conquered her misgiving that she had a kind of subdued pleasure in waiting for the effect upon her brother, of her implication.

Henry's first thoughts were mere confusion. Then he was seized with a deep solicitude for his sister. Finally he realised her present mood with an astonishment which overpowered every other emotion. His comment was mere ejaculation:

"Well," he foolishly exclaimed, "you're a very cool young woman!"

Agnes smiled. She had followed the succession of her brother's thoughts, and she therefore was not offended by the banality of his final remark.

"I wasn't always so cool," she said. "I was terrified at first. And the curious thing is that I was terrified before I knew. But now I have something to live for. Besides, I have found such wonderful friends. I feel safe with Monica."

Henry wondered why he had so utterly neglected his sister.

"Agnes," he said, "I've been a brute, don't you think?"

"How?"

"Well, I never really worried about you till Rupert came to my rooms this morning. He showed me the Roll of Honour."

Agnes eagerly sat up in bed.

"Is Rupert home, then?"

"Rupert's a wounded soldier. He was with Bob in the last advance."

"Then he can tell me about it."

"I've arranged with Monica to bring him here to-morrow."

"Why not to-night?"

"Rupert has to go to Brighton to-day for a Medical Board. Besides, I'm dining with father to-night, Agnes."

Agnes clasped her hands.

"Oh, Henry. Is it a victory?"

Henry's eyes lit with a sombre satisfaction.

"Yes, Agnes, I fancy it is a victory. I've had a letter. It simply calls me to a business interview. I think I know what it means. You see I've been getting into touch with the Ordnance Department. It is now admitted that the system of private contract has broken down. Another strike is threatened at the works, and I believe that father has been warned of the intention of the Government to control certain picked establishments."

Agnes had a pang of sentiment. She saw her father grey-haired, deserted and beaten. She thought of the desolate, large house stripped of its children, and the big table with its solid china and glass and metal lying vastly between her parents.

"Poor father!" she sighed.

Henry arrested her quickly.

"I shouldn't waste your pity if I were you," he said. "He's had his wicked run, and it's up to us to undo as much as we can of his bad work."

Agnes was startled by the vehemence of her brother.

"Henry," she said, "I believe you're going to be the hardest of the family. Rupert's hard enough where father's concerned. But I think you're going to be harder."

"I've got to make up for arrears," said Henry, grimly shutting his mouth in a way his father had. "Anything I can do to smash the vile work I and my family have done during the last half-century will at once be put in hand. I can assure you of that."

He paused a moment, and saw that Agnes was tired.

"I'm shouting at you like an orator," he said, "which isn't sensible. I shall want all my steam

to-night. Father isn't defeated yet by any means."

"Suppose"—Agnes hesitated—"suppose he asks after me. What will you say?"

"I shall say—sha'n't I?—that you're well and happy."

"That will do very well," said Agnes faintly, closing her eyes. "But don't lose your temper, Harry."

She added inconsequently:

"I wonder what father would say if he knew all there is to know."

Henry shrank a little. He heard in imagination his father's inevitable and curt description of his sister's conduct.

"He will learn nothing from me," said Henry.

XXVII

SHUNNING DEFEAT

HENRY dismissed his cab that evening at some distance from the house in FitzJohn's Avenue. It was a fine evening; and summer, almost at the full, pushing its way into London, had filled the town with blossom. But Henry wanted, not so much to enjoy the summer as to prepare himself for the meeting with his father.

He could not easily overthrow the habit of a lifetime. The coming interview roused in him an ingrained and customary trepidation. He was sure of himself and of his case. His apprehension was simply of nerves; but it was strong enough to make him feel the need of all his weapons.

Why had his father summoned him? Was he to be offered some sort of compromise—an alliance upon terms? Or was his father simply in need of information? The old man must surely know of his son's correspondence with the authorities?

Henry shut his lips more firmly together. He

was filled with the ardour of a man converted. He was going to meet, not his father, but a Prince of Darkness, behind whom was ranked industrial England. Of industrial England he was ready to talk at length.

How would his father meet him—as a man subdued by the event, or as a man ready to break rather than yield? He could not imagine his father as yielding an inch in argument or practice. If his father had said that high explosive could not hurt a man Henry could conceive him as standing at the mouth of a gun and continuing to assert the harmlessness of high explosive while the opposing gunner made ready to prove the contrary upon his flesh and blood.

Henry had arrived at his father's house. He ascended the steps and pulled at the iron bell handle. The beating of his heart surprised him.

His mother was in the drawing-room. He had curiously forgotten his mother. All her children tended to forget her, since first the long feud began between the older and the younger generation in FitzJohn's Avenue. They regarded her as someone attached to their father; and, except in occasional kindness, not to be distinguished. There were times when she seemed to them forlorn—

when they compassionately remembered her as a pale and patient attendant upon their enemy. Then they would call at the house and speak to her nicely.

Henry had not thought of her in connection with the present crisis, no more than Agnes, that morning, had thought of her in connection with her own event. On seeing her, however, in the large room, Henry fed afresh his hostility to his father upon his mother's desolation. It was a desolation the more penetrating owing to the innocence of the victim. His mother did not feel her tragedy; and by that its extent was measured. The placid years of her absolute acceptance of her husband's will—years absorbed in the decorous administration of his house and family—had atrophied all the nerves whereby tragedy can make itself felt. Even as Henry came towards her across the big room she perceived, on rising to greet him, a piece of white thread upon the carpet, picked it up and threw it into the fire. Something stabbed at Henry as he saw her do this.

"Well, mother," he said, kissing her upon a lightly offered cheek, "how are you?"

"Very well, Henry, dear," she said, as though she answered what was simply a polite formula. She

fingered an ornament on the table, and arranged it more symmetrically.

"Your father will be down soon," she added.

It was a phrase very familiar to Henry. For visitors, or for her own children, it was invariable. Their father would be down soon. Meantime she would do her best to meet a gap which could never be adequately filled.

Henry was shaken with a savage desire to find in her a spark of rebellion.

"Father can wait," he curtly said. "I want to hear about yourself."

"About me? What is it you want to know?"

What indeed was it that he wanted to know. He wanted to know why she was content to let herself be robbed of her children; how she could go on living in this empty house; whether she never felt lost and comfortless; how she could persevere in her monstrous allegiance to a man in whom he had never once detected a spark of affection or respect for her. He wanted suddenly to know all these things. But he said:

"Suppose you tell me about the rheumatism."

"Thank you, Henry. I've been very comfortable these last few days, which is a great blessing, for the maids have been very troublesome. Mary

has a young man at the war, and he's been home on leave. She stayed away from the house all last night. Of course I wanted to dismiss her. But your father only laughed. He says that there will be no more English family life after the war."

"Doubtless things will be a little different," said Henry.

He looked at his mother, tranquilly knitting, quite unconscious of any sinister significance in the phrase she had used. She had tried English family life upon a large scale, and she did not even know that she had failed.

"Everything seems to be changing," his mother restfully continued. "I had to give two shillings a pound for hake this morning, and the fishmonger was unable to send it to the house."

Henry rose impatiently.

"Yes, mother. And poor Bob Rivers was killed in Flanders seven days ago, and Rupert——"

"Yes, Henry. Rupert came to see me this morning. It was a great surprise for me, you may be sure. He looked so well and hearty in spite of his wounded arm. He wanted to know what I had done with Agnes."

"Well, mother, what *have* you done with Agnes?"

"Why, my dear boy, I haven't, of course, done

anything with Agnes. I believe she's staying with Mrs. Kenneth John in Golders Green."

"Aren't you at all anxious about her?"

Mrs. Smith looked up in mild surprise from her knitting.

"Why should I be anxious?" she asked. "Your father has told me not to worry about it. But——"

Henry saw upon his mother's face the small flutter of dutiful preparation which always heralded his father's approach. It began in a slight tremor of the lips, and ended in her eyes—an almost imperceptible expression of alertness and strain.

"But here is your father," she concluded.

Henry had already seen him out of the side of his eye. He came forward with that sardonic affectation of hospitality which Henry had so often witnessed as the prelude of a vigorous offensive.

"Well, my boy," he said, "come along and have some food. I've had a heavy day, an unusually heavy day."

They went into the dining-room, and they dined. Henry detected malice in the way they dined. The soup was rich and plentiful. The fish was itself a meal. The capon was fattened to perfection. Mr. Smith, with napkin well tucked in at

the neck, literally discussed these things with an insolent satisfaction, in which Henry found himself mocked and challenged without an opportunity of rejoinder. Mr. Smith radiated the assumption that, after a successful and deserving day, he had won the right to dine as he chose, and to hold the earth to ransom.

"Just a little more clove in the bread sauce, Harry, don't you think?"

He looked at Henry over a loaded fork. His eyes danced with a hard amusement. Henry had already stirred under the prod of his father's mockery.

"I don't know," said Henry. "Does it enormously matter, do you think?"

"It matters enormously to me," retorted Mr. Smith, sipping at an excellent Burgundy.

"Cloves are scarce," mildly observed Mrs. Smith.

"But money's plentiful, my dear," countered her husband. "At last I find it extremely plentiful; and so, apparently, does the Government. The Government seems to believe in the old maxim that breakages are good for trade. We're all going to be rich and prosperous, and the Government is going to be richest of all. That's why they don't think it necessary to tax us—eh, Henry? They're

going into business themselves, and they're going to make so much money that they will be able to pay everybody five per cent. for the necessary accommodation."

"The taxes will come," said Henry briefly.

The dinner wore uncomfortably to an end. Henry wished he had stipulated for a merely business interview. He was at the end of his patience when his father, in place of his customary nod, said to Mrs. Smith:

"Now, my dear, run away to your own apartments. Henry and I are going to talk over some business."

Henry went with his mother to the door and closed it after her. He came back to the table. Mr. Smith was trimming and lighting a cigar. His manner was insolently confidential. Henry flamed out into an anger which he could no longer control. He felt instinctively that his father, with a wicked skill, was treating him in this casual way in order to retain the advantage of his years and prestige. His father's affected, sub-current amusement disconcerted him. He hotly resolved to end it. He remained standing beside the table while his father quizzed him from above the spirit lamp at which he was lighting his cigar.

"Well, Harry," he said, "what are you going to do about it?"

Henry clenched his hands upon the back of his chair.

"Drop it, father," he said, and immediately felt how absurdly boyish he was.

"You've had your dinner, and you've had your fun, such as it is," Henry went on. "I want to know now why you've sent for me. Either you treat me seriously, or I'll say good-night and save my temper."

"Save your temper by all means, Harry. I'm going to treat you very seriously indeed. In fact I'm going to treat you as my immediate and sole inheritor."

Henry felt the ground slipping from under him. What sort of a victory was this? There was no sign of defeat in the old man. Mr. Smith's hard blue eyes invited him with amused irony to a friendly council. His chin had the old aggressive thrust, and the mouth was set firm in a grim, contemplative smile. Henry impertinently remembered that Agnes that morning had pitied this invincible old man who seemed just now to be admitting he was beaten. Henry still held himself erect.

"I don't understand you at all," he said.

"That's what we're here to remedy, my boy. You're here, among other things, to learn that I've decided to retire from business. I left the factory this morning for the last time. You can go there yourself to-morrow, and do what you like with it. You have my free permission to blow it up, burn it down, sell it or give it away in charity."

The old man paused, and suddenly hurled his new cigar into the fire. His blue eyes lit with fury.

"In fact, Harry," he concluded, "you can go to the devil in your own tomfool way, and you needn't even be civil about it."

This sudden blaze of temper told Henry what most he desired to know.

"In plain English, father, you're beaten."

Mr. Smith recovered his composure.

"On the contrary," he incisively said, "it means that I do not choose to be beaten. That will be left to you. I've won all my battles, and I'm retiring with the spoil. Please listen to what I have to say."

"That's what I'm here for," said Henry

"To begin with, you will be faced to-morrow at the works upon one side with a list of grievances from the men and upon the other side with strong

recommendations from the Government to concede the majority of the points demanded. The men are ready to strike upon a given signal. Their strike will seriously delay the delivery of goods promised to the Government, and I have, in fact, already been threatened by the Government with intervention. Intervention, unfortunately, coming from this Government, means one thing only. The blackmail levied on the country by these blackguards at the works will be paid, and their employer will be required to pay it. The long and short of the matter is that I am not going to be that employer. I'm one of the few living men who have never allowed themselves to be frightened or bullied by organised labour, and I'm not going to do the dirty work of a Government which has lapped up the spittle of the trade unions for a generation. That is your job, Harry, my boy. I know you're just pining to join the congregation which worships anything in the shape of a federation, and I can promise you as fine a bellyful of dirt in the next few months as anyone could desire to eat in a lifetime. Not a step can be taken to-day, even though the country's safety depends upon it, until the Government has asked permission of the Labour leaders. Our politicians

have put organised labour above the law, and they have allowed it to become a revolution. And now, when these blackmailers are threatening to starve our armies for a penny a day, and systematically cheating their employers of time and work, they are to be flattered and bribed. That, Henry, is something I prefer to see from a distance. I'm not taking part. The Government must find a younger man—someone who is a little more supple at the knees."

"Someone, also, whom the men can trust," suggested Henry.

Mr. Smith brought the flat of his heavy hand violently down upon the table. A wine-glass jumped into the air and shivered upon the floor.

"I've played square in all my dealings," he said.

"You've played square by your own rules," said Henry in a voice that trembled; "but they were false and abominable rules. You've only two points against the men, and they're points which score harder against you than against them."

"I should like to have this explained to me."

"I grant all you say about the men at the works. They have lost the only good thing in life. They have no pride in their work. There is no honesty in what they do. But that is only because they

have been cheated in the past of an honest price. Limitation of output was not casually inspired by the essential vileness of the working man. It was a rejoinder. It is your worst point against them to-day, and it is your own bad coin returned."

"And your second point, my son?"

"My second point is that these men are fighting for their own hand at a time when they ought to be fighting for the State. But who first set them the example? Who first opposed capital to labour and ignored the country?"

Henry paused for breath. His excitement was painful.

"So that is your case?" Mr. Smith politely inquired.

"It is the essential part of it."

Mr. Smith took another cigar, and lit it in silence. Then he walked over to a large bureau in the corner of the room and produced a sheaf of papers. He showed no trace of having considered or felt in the least his son's indictment.

"Shall we get to business, Harry?" he said, returning to the table. "I will explain to you how I propose to effect my retirement."

Henry winced under the insult of his father's absolute ignoring of his challenge.

"Have you nothing to say to me?" he asked in hot anger. "Won't you justify yourself at all?"

Mr. Smith's eyes narrowed in a concentrated contempt for the young man in front of him.

"You young fool," he said in tones that cut, "do you imagine that I'm going to answer such nonsense at my time of life? I've fought my men for fifty years. I know them for a lazy herd which has got to be mastered before it can be of the slightest use to itself or to anyone else. I've ruled my men for fifty years, and I could rule them now. But I'm not allowed any longer to be master in my own shop. You and your political confederates think you see a better method. Very well. I'm not going to stand in the way."

"But——"

The old man tapped the papers.

"We will get to work," he rasped. "There is no more to be said."

It was several hours before they had disposed of the necessary technical business. The house and street had become very quiet by the time they had finished. When Mr. Smith began to lock up his papers the fire had burned itself to a few dull ashes in the grate, and the ticking of the elaborately

ornamental clock upon the mantelpiece had become oppressively loud.

"You will stay with us to-night, Harry?" asked Mr. Smith indifferently, as he turned away from the bureau.

"No, thank you, father. I will walk back to my rooms."

For a moment they looked awkwardly at one another. Old associations crowded about them. The figures and facts which had filled their negotiations of the past few hours themselves witnessed to an old familiar intercourse in dozens of triumphant enterprises. For a moment it seemed as though they might more softly part than the bitterness of their late argument had promised.

Then Henry saw appear in his father's eye a lurking amusement at the way in which they stood, thus awkwardly, under a spell.

He shook himself free in an abrupt resentment.

"Good-night, father," he said, and moved to the door.

"One moment," said Mr. Smith.

Henry turned. Mr. Smith was taking from his pocket-book a slip of paper.

"I do not wish ever to be reminded of to-night's

work. We shall probably not meet again in the ordinary way."

He put the pocket-book back into his pocket, and unfolded a soiled sheet of paper.

Henry aloofly watched him. Did his father, after all, desire to part with him as a friend? Something told him that, far from this, he was about to be challenged afresh.

Mr. Smith offered him the paper. Henry came forward hesitatingly and took it. It was a soiled and crumpled letter ordering Second Lieutenant Rivers to report himself for active service.

More than ever before Henry hated his father in that moment. Something in him prayed that the old man would not insult his own daughter. His father was speaking.

"That document," he said, "was found by my caretaker with other evidence in our house-boat at Twickenham. Tell Agnes from me, if she is still interested in my existence, that all I desire with regard to her is to remain in complete ignorance of anything she may do. I have an idea that ignorance will be best."

Henry crushed the note and flung it into the grate.

"Is that all, father?"

"Yes, Henry, I think that is all I have to say."

Henry without further farewell turned and went.

Mr. Smith remained a moment in the room till he had heard his son let himself out into the street. Then he switched off the light. As he reached the door the smouldering ball of paper into which the note had been crushed burst into flame. He turned to see what it was. A few shadows from the chairs and tables flickered on the walls of the empty room, and a few dying cinders rustled to a cold and desolate extinction upon the hearth.

XXVIII

A CONVERT TO KHAKE

PELHAM alighted from the train at Waterloo on the morning after Henry had come to terms with his father. His future had already been settled. His expert knowledge of chemistry and his claims upon an uncle highly placed in the Royal Engineers guaranteed him a useful post without any very serious delay.

When he found himself at the great military terminus of Waterloo, thronged with khaki and busy with the evidence of war, he was secretly happy to contrast the impression made on him by these things with the impression they had made on him during his outward journey to Devonshire some twelve weeks ago. Gladly he felt now that he had a share in all this. He had cast away, in a vivid reaction, all his old misgivings. Conversations with Graham and Phrene, prolonged deeply into the few nights they had spent after the fire in a west country inn, had smoothed out his decision

with a show of logic. He had been brought to fight by the same imperious necessity which all men instinctively acknowledged; but Phrene's attitude had enabled him to ignore the inconsistency between his former professions and his present conduct. The cultivation and the sacrifice of self meet and agree at their journey's end. His late professions had broken down only because they had not gone far enough. He must be content to lose his life before it could be worth very much to him. He must fight, if only for his right to be unlike other men; and, if he died, he would at least have put in a claim for his ideals upon the Roll of Honour.

This was how he put it quietly to himself, but he did not in any way intend to play the tedious moralist with a new philosophy to match his khaki. Having come to terms with himself, he disencumbered himself of any further meditation.

He could have slapped the soldiers wholesale between the shoulders as he saw them at Waterloo, standing in groups with their packs and rifles. He was ineradically a boy, and joy was uppermost to-day.

He took a cab to his rooms in Curzon Street. The recruiting bills no longer offended him. He

was charmed with the joviality of an invitation extended in the Strand to all who might desire to teach a Turkish bird to say "Rule, Britannia." The clamour of the meaner sort of appeal he could now dismiss with a shrug. It was none of his business. Pelham mentally wrote off these things as the concern of a few dingy politicians who sat within the shadow of a sham Gothic masterpiece, and talked about never sheathing the sword. The future would belong to the men who grappled with their several decisions and not with their leaders who refused to command them.

His cab was stopped for a moment by a press of traffic in Trafalgar Square. The meek lions holding in their mouths an urgent message from the throne looked more than ever as if they had just been ordered from the stores. From four sides of the plinth the spectacle was offered to an indifferent public of a "free and spontaneous uprising of the people." Upon the side nearest his cab some Indians, back from the trenches, were invited by their English officers to insult comprehensively the Imperial white slackers who surrounded them.

This they did, with smiling readiness and point—one stalwart young civilian being asked in Hindustanee whether he had been created male or female.

Upon another side a breezy sergeant-major from the Colonies first assured his audience that they only wanted men who were willing and eager to join. Then he advised any employer who might be present to dismiss all his fit young men of military age. Finally he urged one or two young women who were standing near to adopt the policy of Lysistrata the Athenian.

Pelham would once have been most bitterly enraged by all this; but to-day he found it droll. He even took a professional interest in the proceedings, and amiably wished the rather self-conscious young subalterns on the plinth good sport and a full bag.

He drove on to his rooms, and found there a wire from Diana.

Diana hitherto had remained silent. She now explained in a lengthy telegram that she had been distracted with work in her big hospital at Boulogne, but was in London for twelve hours, collecting stores. She would be at the house in Kensington at three o'clock.

Pelham rejoiced. Diana's silence had been the one blot upon his new content. Nevertheless the nearness of their meeting a little daunted him. Would he be able to throw off all constraint and

acknowledge generously that there really had been no depth in their late estrangement? For Diana, he clearly saw, had in a sense been right. He had sacrificed her, not to any deep necessity, but to habits of thought which he had never seriously tested.

Would he be ready to admit all this when he actually saw her in her well-remembered Philistian pride? There were limits to his new humility. Diana, after all, had been as wrong as he. He had been superficial and pedantic, but she had scarcely been more generous. Pelham would never admit that, in hating Diana's callousness—much of it assumed—to the things which deeply moved him, he had been wrong; and for that he would not ask to be forgiven. It was not a case of simply falling into her arms, however much he desired it. There were more ways than one in which their interview might go seriously astray.

Pelham went to lunch at a very junior literary club in Piccadilly. There in the smoking-room he suddenly felt himself beaten on the back, and, turning, saw Rupert Smith.

"Jimmy," Rupert shouted, "what on earth are you doing here? I thought you were hiding in Devonshire."

"Was," said Pelham briefly.

"It's for you to explain," he added. "I thought you were fighting."

"I'm a wounded soldier," Rupert said.

They settled to some coffee and cigarettes.

"And now," said Rupert, when the waiter had gone, "tell me about it. What are you doing in town?"

"I am quite delighted to tell you," said Pelham.

His eyes were dancing with fun. It was good to meet his old friend like this, aware that there was no longer anything to irk their sympathy. Rupert looked at him as he paused to take his coffee.

"You needn't tell me one thing, Jimmy," he said. "You needn't tell me you're going to join the army. You've got militarism stamped all over you."

"I'm converted," said Pelham gravely. "I'm coming into your magnificent war. I want to kill hundreds of Germans. It came upon me quite suddenly when I was sitting upon a beach in Devonshire that war was a glorious and a civilising influence. It makes people refined and merciful."

"Well, Jimmy," said Rupert, "I don't grudge you your ironical spirits so long as you're happy."

What's it going to be—the Army Service Corps or the Great General Staff?"

"I think it will be poison gas," said Pelham. "Poison gas will suit me rather well. It will pander to my missionary zeal."

"Seriously, Jimmy, please."

"Seriously, it will very probably be poison gas. I've had the promise of a place with five other chemists, one of whom has already administered several litres of poison gas to a herd of rats. They all died in very great agony. We're going out in a batch within the next few days—I48th Division Royal Engineers."

Rupert looked sidelong at his friend, and hesitated while he flicked the ash from his cigarette.

"I like your high spirits, Jimmy," he said at last. "But you won't talk like that when you've seen the fighting."

He paused, and seemed to be looking at things which had left their mark upon him.

"I once saw one of our fellows in a trench," he continued after a pause, "jammed up against a German he had tried to kill. He hadn't done it cleanly, and there was no elbow-room to finish what he had begun. The German was screaming into his ear; and we carried our own man out of the

trench stark mad with horror. That sort of thing, Jimmy, civilises a man, unless he's a wolf by nature. You won't talk like a savage, even in fun, when you've seen a few things of that kind."

There was a short silence. Neither of the men needed to speak again. Pelham quietly accepted his friend's rebuke. In the more serious temper it gave to their conversation Rupert said:

"You've seen the news about Bob Rivers?"

Pelham nodded.

"He's the first of our set to go," said Rupert. "You've said some bitter things to one another, Jimmy, in your time."

Pelham threw his cigarette into the fireplace.

"I'm thankful to say," he said, in solemn honesty, "that the bitter things we said to one another were always said with the best intentions."

Then, after a pause, he added:

"This will have been a hard blow for your sister."

"I'm seeing her to-night at Kenneth John's place. I'm taking her Bob's sword, and a story which will make her proud. You ought to come with me, Jimmy."

"No, Rupert, I'm too happy to-day. I should jar."

They talked a little longer, till Pelham found it was time to go to Diana.

He left the club shortly before three, and walked towards the Park.

Pelham imagined Diana as she had last left him. He remembered her intolerance, her urgent will to prevail with him, her quickness to take offence and demand from him a full submission.

This was the woman who ruled equally his hopes and fears—the woman he hoped to claim, but half expected to estrange.

Then, as he crossed the room towards her, he left his memory of this hard and brilliant woman at the door. Diana was rapidly checking hospital linen as she passed it into a large hamper. She looked up as he was announced, and Pelham saw she was tired, with faint circles of sleeplessness under her eyes. The plain lines of her uniform made her severe, yet fragile, to the eye. There was none of the brilliance, the outward pressure of her personality, of which he had always been so keenly aware; and this was clearly due, not to any loss in herself of individuality or power, but to an acquired new knowledge that the things she had once asserted were for the moment negligible. They had no part in her present intent and devoted life.

The Queen of Philistia, with whom Pelham had come to treat, had somehow changed into a tired woman who was abusing her strength.

He came shyly forward.

"You have had my letters," he began.

She seemed to be equally embarrassed. She was about to say something, but the sudden excitement put a strain upon her nerves. She put out her hand vaguely and her mouth moved. Pelham thought she was going to faint.

He came to her quickly, and made her sit down. He spoke to her in short phrases, abrupt with feeling.

"Di, dear, you're simply worn out. Let me do something. You really must take a rest. I had no idea."

She withdrew from his arm.

"Jim," she said, with suspense in her eyes, "why have you come to town? You said you had something to tell me. What is it?"

"It's all right, Di. I'm trying to become a fighting man. But that's not the point. You ought to be in bed and asleep. What's all this you're doing? It simply won't do, you know."

Their shyness fell away. There was nothing now to discuss. The old days of difference upon

unessential things—unessential in the presence of their present union upon the same big enterprise—had become ridiculous. Something had dwarfed all their differences and brought them humbly into touch.

"I'm finishing this packing. It's against the rules to leave it to anyone else. Then I'll rest. You see I've got to take the boat back to-night."

"Is that essential?"

"I'm afraid it is."

"Very well," said Pelham. "Let me see you finish."

He watched her as she checked the last item on the list and flung down the lid of the hamper. Then he pulled the sofa to the fire and arranged the cushions.

"Have you had anything to eat lately?" he asked, as he made her comfortable.

"That's all right, Jim. I'm going to have a good square meal with tea before starting to Victoria. I've got just a couple of hours. But, Jim"—she rose on one elbow and looked at him—"don't you want to talk to me or anything?"

He leaned to her, and fell in love with her fathoms deep.

"Di, dear," he said, "I don't want to talk to you

at all. I've been talking all my life, and I'm sick of it. I want nothing at all now except to see you go to sleep for two full hours."

A moment later, just before she slept, she said:

"You don't know, Jimmy, how glad I am."

After that there was no sound in the room, as Pelham sat in the chair beside her. Once he added to the fire, and sometimes the cinders dropped explosively into the hearth. But it was in the midst of a deep silence, rhythmic with the quiet breathing of Diana, that Pelham finally heard a great scurrying of rats in the wainscot of his brain. An invisible piper was playing to a joyful self-destruction all the phrases, ideas, formulæ, prepossession, justifications, eccentricities and original principles which had gnawed at his increasing purpose during the last wretched months of his life; and it was a simple soldier, without misgiving or reserve, who woke Diana with a kiss at half-past four.

XXIX

YOUNG ENGLAND

UPON the evening of that day, when Pelham was waving good-bye to his wife at Folkestone, Rupert was waiting for his sister in the drawing-room at Golders Green.

Agnes came in with a flush of welcome; and Rupert, as he kissed her, saw that she had passed the worst of her grief.

"You've been in England two days," Agnes began.

"But yesterday I had to be in Brighton. Besides, I wanted to be sure you were ready to see me. That's why I sent Harry to you yesterday."

"I'm ready for you, Rupert."

Rupert paused a moment.

"I was with Bob," he said at last. "He told me about you. He was greatly troubled, and I promised him——"

Rupert paused, not knowing how to finish what he had to say.

"I've brought you his sword," he added.

Agnes looked at the sword, which lay beside them on the table, and she said quietly:

"I'm happy to think that this"—she touched the sword—"belongs to me by right, and that one day perhaps——"

And now it was Agnes who stopped, daunted by the intimacy of her thought. She came closer to Rupert and said:

"Tell me how he died."

"He died like an English officer. He was helping one of his men back to the trench. The man had been wounded on patrol, and Bob insisted on fetching him in. I was back in the third line, and when Bob was carried past, he saw me and stopped the bearers. I saw there was no hope. I shall never forget it as long as I live. He died in my arms. Four men in his company went out that night and accounted for the fellow who shot him."

"Pipped! Pipped!" cried Agnes, with a quiet little laugh, as the tears started into her eyes.

"That's what he called it."

She leaned against the table, and Rupert moved towards her in alarm, but she straightened herself.

"I'm quite all right," she said. "But I think we'll sit down till Monica comes in."

They talked after that of Rupert's own experiences, and of his near return to France. They did not speak again of Rivers.

Rivers, indeed, was not once mentioned in the evening which followed. But for all of them alike, for John and Monica, for Henry and Rupert, as well as for Agnes, it was an evening dedicated to him. All that was said in the house that night was ruled by his presence in their thoughts. The sword which lay in the house turned every way to restrain their speaking.

When Monica took Agnes from the table the conversation dropped for a moment.

Rupert felt acutely the strangeness of having his brother Henry there. Compared with John, Henry was almost a stranger. His presence in that colloquy of three was a continual reminder of changes made by the war in places far from the line of battle. Henry, in a corner of the drawing-room, before dinner, had told Rupert of the result of his last interview with their father. Rupert could hardly believe that the masterful will which had been for him as permanent and unalterable a thing as England herself had been obliterated.

"There's something I should like to know," Rupert threw out suddenly into the smoky silence of the room. "What sort of a people shall we be when the war is finished?"

"Much the same sort of people," said John. "We went into the war as amateurs. We're fighting it as amateurs, and we shall be amateurs at the end."

"Kenneth," said Rupert, "you've got your face too close to the stone. Just look away from your leading articles for a moment, and tell me if we're not getting indirectly in our English way, something very good. We haven't, it is true, your solemn league and covenant of all Englishmen enforced by the State. But every Englishman who matters is arriving at a covenant with himself. In most cases he has had to face a strictly personal and domestic crisis, and for this reason alone the war must leave upon England a deeper mark than upon any other country in the world."

John looked at Rupert.

"Is this," he asked, "a defence of the voluntary system?"

"I don't mean it in that way. Politics to-night are barred. Let us look only at New England. I am simply asking whether a system which dis-

graces our leaders will not be recognised in days to come as exactly the school we needed for the recovery of our English virtue. What do our leaders matter? They stand for the age in which our English citizenship was lost. But I believe that our political disgrace is bringing its own painful remedy. There is hardly a person in the country who by reason of the absence of leading in our Government has not had to ask and to answer for himself what his citizenship implies."

John rose from his seat, and took another cigarette from the box.

"Tell me this," he said. "How do you propose to save the men who have discovered what their citizenship implies from being outvoted by those whom the war has failed to inspire. Our system of fighting with the picked men of the country has just this small drawback. It is an aristocratic system, and Great Britain happens to be organised politically as a democracy. The best men are fighting; but the best men have only one vote apiece."

"The new generation," said Henry, intervening with diffidence in a kind of conversation to which he was not accustomed, "will never fall under the old. I can tell you from my own experience that

our divisions to-day are hated even by the men who make them. They belong to the past. Take the settlement in which I am myself engaged. All the younger men at the works are beginning to hate the quarrels to which their elders have committed them. I am amazed at the ease with which I have won over the younger men."

"It is an omen," said Rupert.

He turned to John.

"Do you doubt it?" he asked.

"I have never doubted it," said John. "I have never doubted that the future will be finer than the past. The omens are all about us. We are thinking to-night not only of the sword which lies in this house. There is the news of Jimmy Pelham and Willoughby. There is Rupert here and Ponsonby out in France. Think of the old nights in Mortimer Street—the things which excited us. We considered ourselves to be the most interesting people in the world. We analysed ourselves and characters in lengthy autobiographies. We wrote books about ourselves; and there was one thing on which we were all agreed. We held ourselves strictly aloof from all simple and vulgar abstractions, such as patriotism and service. We were predatory and critical. We industriously

nursed ourselves; and we had an opinion for everything under the sun."

"Moreover," John continued, looking with a smile towards Henry, "at that time our young tradesmen were fighting one another for customers and their work-people for wages; and our politicians——"

"Tabula rasa," said Rupert.

"Agreed," said John. "We will turn from those days to a fresher time. Rupert bravely destroyed a masterpiece of analytical decadence upon the evening war was declared. Henry has annihilated his own father. Pelham has learned the precise worth of ideas in a vacuum. Graham has discovered anew the old truism that he who would really find himself must be ready to lose himself. Baddeley is by way of becoming some sort of a man. Ponsonby has turned from a looking-glass hero into the real thing. I myself am atoning for years spent in a non-committal and a shrugging taciturnity by earnestly repeating a weekly liturgy composed of democratic truisms. Bob——"

He paused a moment, pulled up by the incongruity of his garrulous progress with the silence which here was most fitting.

"Bob," he concluded, "has the best of us all."

There was a short silence. It was Rupert who broke it.

"And yet," he said to John, "you seemed just now to doubt that all would be well."

"I do not really doubt it, but I hate to think that young England must be so long in the making. I want to see young England as, literally and at once, a nation in arms, not simply as a nation which greedily accepts the service of its best men and reluctantly allows itself to be leavened."

He paused and turned personally to Rupert.

"And I want you fellows out there, if you can ever think of me at all, to think of me as doing what I can always to get young England recognised as a fighting democracy."

"You will not succeed," said Rupert. "England will never be really a democratic country. The whole spirit of England is aristocratic. It will always be the part of her best men to act for the rest. Patriotism will never be logically recognised, in an Act of Parliament, as due from every citizen. You will never get your principle. England has never proceeded by principle, but always by instinct and by the drift of events acting upon the most impressionable and vital characters. Young

England will come as a reassertion of our old aristocratic habit of allowing the best men to save the country. This habit, reinforced and reasserted, will destroy, without any Act of Parliament or any apparent revolution, the burlesque democracy of the last thirty years—a democracy which conferred rights upon our citizens without exacting services and allowed the State to lie at the foot of rival interests.”

“And how do you propose to make your aristocracy a permanent thing? What is there to prevent young England drifting back into the old condition?”

“There is nothing to prevent it,” said Rupert. “We have always drifted back into the old condition. You cannot make aristocracy into a system without destroying it. The paradox and the credit of English life is this: wherever the need arises, the men are found—the men of all classes who to-day are fighting and working for England—even though the conditions are against them. We have lately called ourselves a democratic country—a description under whose sanction we allowed all the democratic vices to flourish without publicly cultivating a single democratic virtue. Nevertheless, when the need arose, our democratic

leaders quietly abdicated and invited our best men to save the country. We are fighting the war—not as a democratic but as an aristocratic nation. The country is now in process of being tuned up to the level of its best men; and this is being done, not by a publicly enforced discipline, but by a gradual pressure which sifts the best from the second best and ranks the nation according to its virtue.”

John shook his head.

“I envy you, Rupert,” he said. “But I cannot agree with you. The time for warfare on the aristocratic principle is past. Even your best men confess it by their methods of recruiting. The nations are fighting to-day, not by heroes, but by hordes. There are not enough of your best men to save the country. We must work for a general average and raise armies by a general law. Otherwise we shall be compounding a sham. At present our methods are neither aristocratic nor democratic. They are simply fraudulent.”

“Some part of the way,” said Rupert, “I go with you. I read your articles, Kenneth, and I agree with nearly every word of them. Probably we shall have to come to terms with your democratic idea since we are fighting a democratic war. But if I know anything of England’s amazing

strength and her equally amazing perversity, you will find that when we are actually brought face to face with the fact of national service we shall compromise with it in a way which will virtually deny the principle. I do not believe that England will ever become an organised democracy. Even if we had to demand general service by compulsion we should find a way of doing it without admitting the straight, clear principle of the thing. The principle of aristocracy is so deeply rooted in our character that, even if every single citizen in the country were pressed into the country's service, we would rather think of ourselves as a nation wholly composed of aristocratic volunteers than admit we were a straightforward democracy."

"Do you defend this lack of clarity in the English?"

"In a sense I do. I am defending England."

"Then what do you say to me? I am working as hard as I can to destroy it."

"I say that you are doing essential work. Our English distrust of definition is a national asset, but it has continually to be tempered by criticism. Why are Englishmen always allowed unlimited liability to criticise their countrymen? Because we know instinctively that, without such criticism,

the opportunism, the distrust of logic, and the reliance we place upon our national reserves of energy would probably destroy us, unless they were continually corrected and opposed. We are the most successful opportunists in history—the real inheritors of Rome—for two reasons. First, we never commit ourselves, except under strict necessity, to any definition or system; we are therefore elastically fit to adapt ourselves to the surprises which history holds in reserve for all nations alike. Second, we take care to keep a critic on the hearth who prevents us from falling dead asleep, and is immediately ready in a crisis to work for the organisation and discipline which our national genius normally refuses to accept.”

“Sophistry,” protested John. “I cannot admit the advantage of keeping a muddled brain. You are trying to make out that England is great because England refuses to think.”

“Not at all. England is great because England is richer in her intuitions than in her thoughts. She is saved from the incurable levity of logicians by a providential stupidity. Nothing is so frivolous as the brain working by its own rules. There was a time when you protested yourself against the modern worship of ideas. You yourself in

1914 would have made the speech I am making now."

"In 1914," Henry interposed, "we were different people."

"The ideas of 1914," said John, "are neither here nor there. At present I am pleading for an idea which is accepted everywhere but in England, and would be accepted here to-day if it were put into an Act of Parliament. It will have to be admitted."

"It will never be admitted."

"You expect to win upon a fraud?"

"I expect to win as we have always won. I expect to win upon a legal fiction. There will be no new principles in young England. There will be only a new spirit."

There was a long pause, at the end of which John rose from his chair.

"You have brought our discussion to a point where we can all agree. Let us leave it there. I will go and see if Monica and Agnes would like us to join them."

He left the room, and crossed the hall to the drawing-room. As he did so Monica came from her dressing-room upstairs and called to him. She was leaning over the banisters with her hands on the rail.

"We have given you up for lost," she said. "Agnes and I are having a talk of our own. You may go back."

John ran up the stairs.

"What are you talking about?" he asked. "Is that a possible question?"

"I think it is, Ken. We are talking about the future."

He kissed her hand upon the rail.

"It is the only theme for to-day," he said.

The telephone bell rang in the hall. John went down to it, and Monica went back to Agnes.

It was Redway who rang, and they talked at length about the grave new telegrams from South Wales. When he had finished John hung up the receiver and stood a moment in the silent hall. After his friends had gone he would go into his study and distastefully write into the night. He could feel the pen now between his fingers.

Some coals dropped noisily upon the drawing-room hearth, and through the open door sudden flames flung shadows all about him. John's eyes were caught by a shining light on the table. The worn leather of the sword of his dead friend reflected the fire.

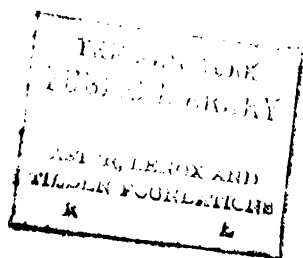
John opened his hand to wipe out the sensation of a pen tightly held, and turned to go back to the dining-room.

Turning, he saw thrown upon the dark wall beside him the enormous shadow of the hilt of the sword projecting from the table. He stood still a moment while the fire died down and the shadow disappeared.

Then he opened the door and went back to his friends.

They were talking still of young England.

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